



THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

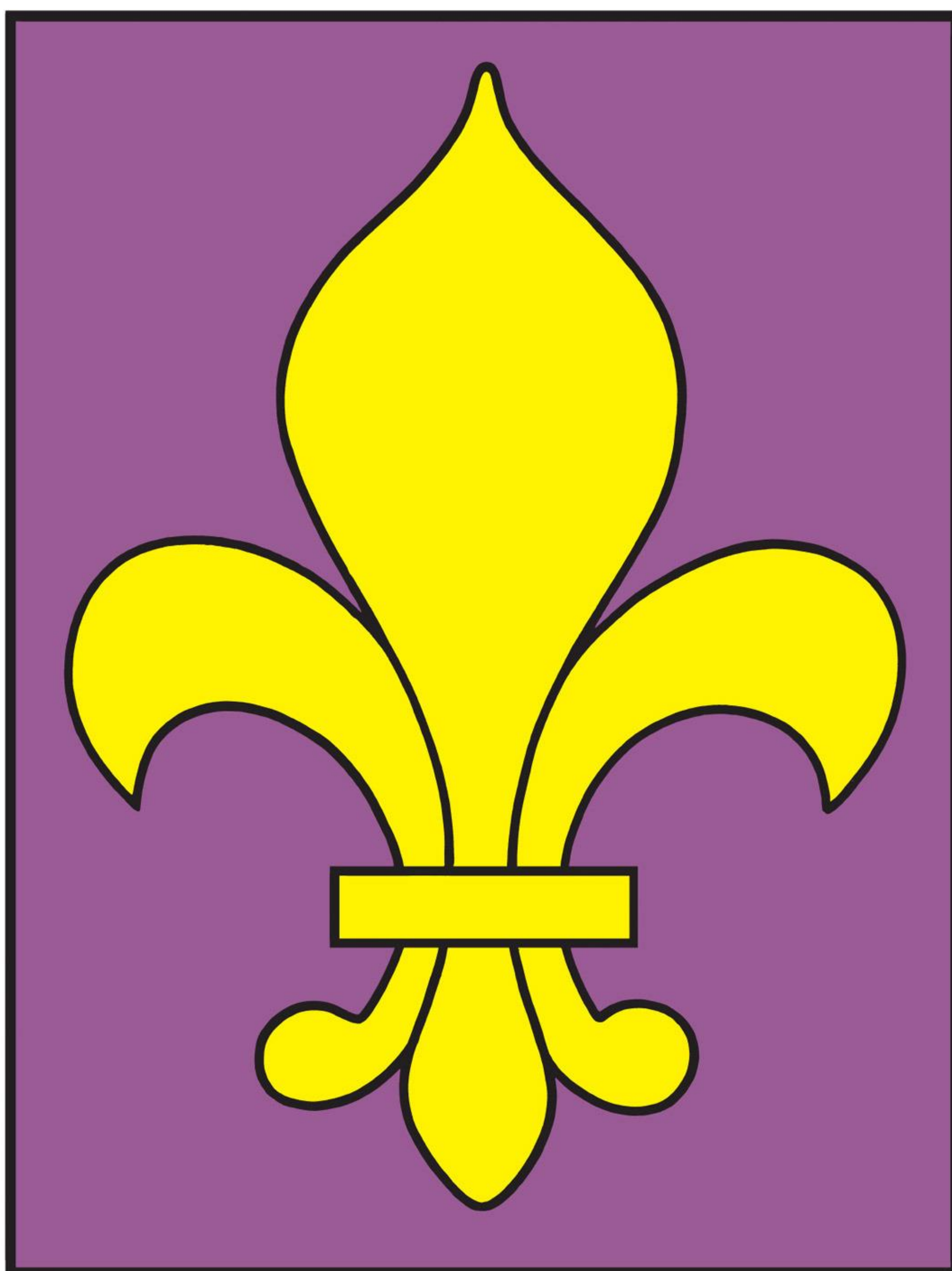
EDGAR P. JACOBS

THE AFFAIR OF THE NECKLACE



E.P. JACOBS

THE AFFAIR OF THE NECKLACE



ON THIS STORMY EARLY AFTERNOON, TRAFFIC IS PARTICULARLY DENSE AROUND PORT-ROYAL. THE FILES OF CARS ARE ONLY ADVANCING IN STOP-AND-GO MOTION, MAKING ITS PAINSTAKING WAY AMONG THOSE IS THE TAXI THAT CAPTAIN BLAKE AND PROFESSOR MORTIMER HAVE TAKEN FROM ONLY AFTER ARRIVING FROM LONDON.

France-Soir! New details on the necklace affair! Get France-Soir!

Hey! France-Soir!



I say, Francis... This necklace business seems to have roused public interest to a remarkable degree... Look at these titles!

My dear Philip, there's no one like a staunch Republican to defend the relics of the Monarchy! It's a well-known fact...

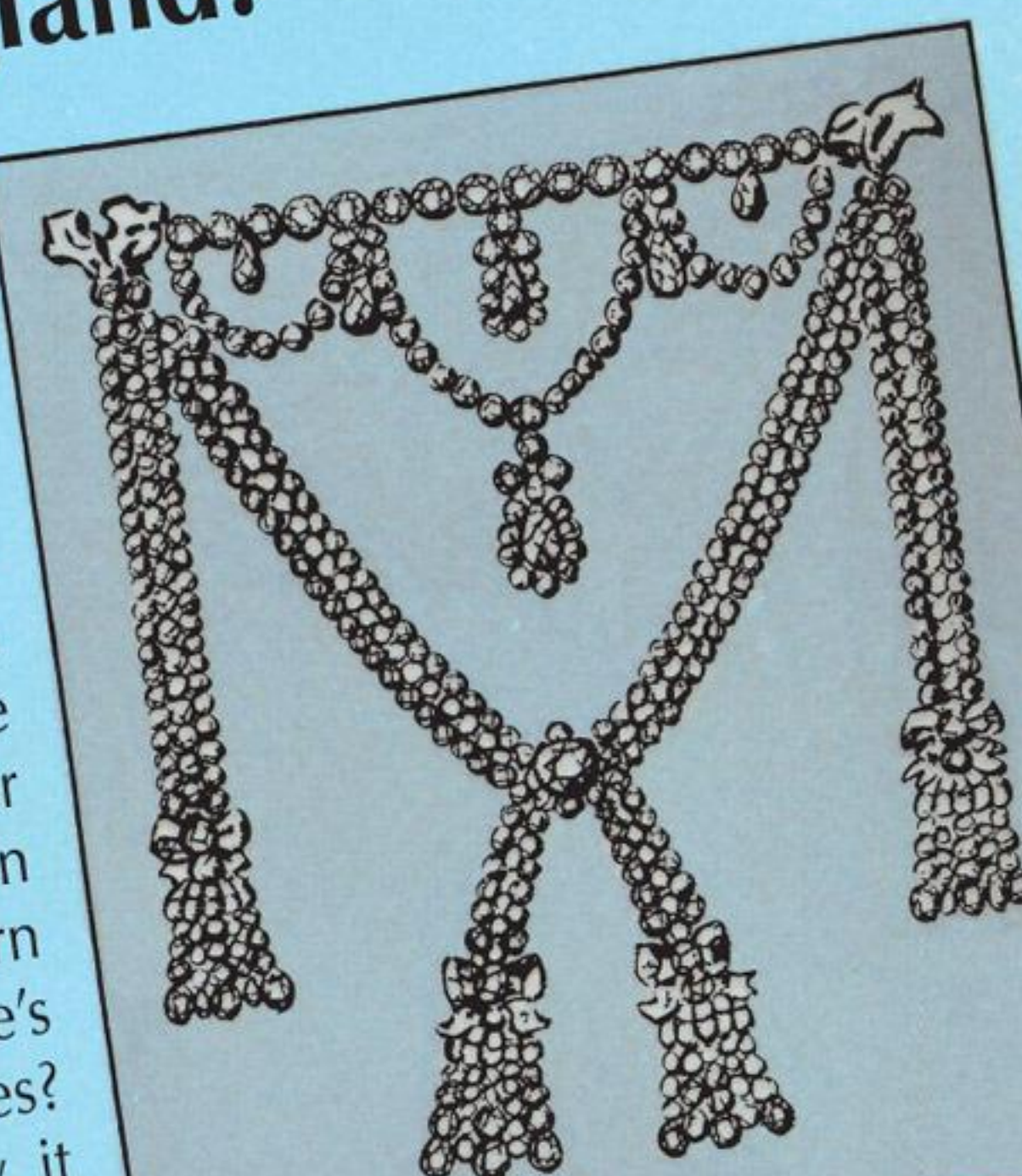


NECKLACE AFFAIR

Sir Henry Williamson rumoured to be planning to offer Marie Antoinette's necklace to the Queen of England!

An unfriendly gesture

Sir Henry Williamson, the fabulously wealthy English collector who discovered Marie Antoinette's famous necklace—the very one at the root of the enormous scandal that prefaced the Revolution and the end of the Ancien Régime—is said to have decided to bequeath it to H.M. Queen Elizabeth!... Isn't it lamentable that this priceless piece, thought to have been dismantled and scattered by the Countess of La Motte and her accomplices, could be found again 178 years later, only to be torn away immediately from France's historical and artistic treasures? To put it bluntly, it



"This historical treasure belongs to France by right"

You have to admit that if Sir Henry does indeed have such intentions in mind, he could be making a grave psychological mistake...

And yet, God knows our countryman knows this side of the Channel well!

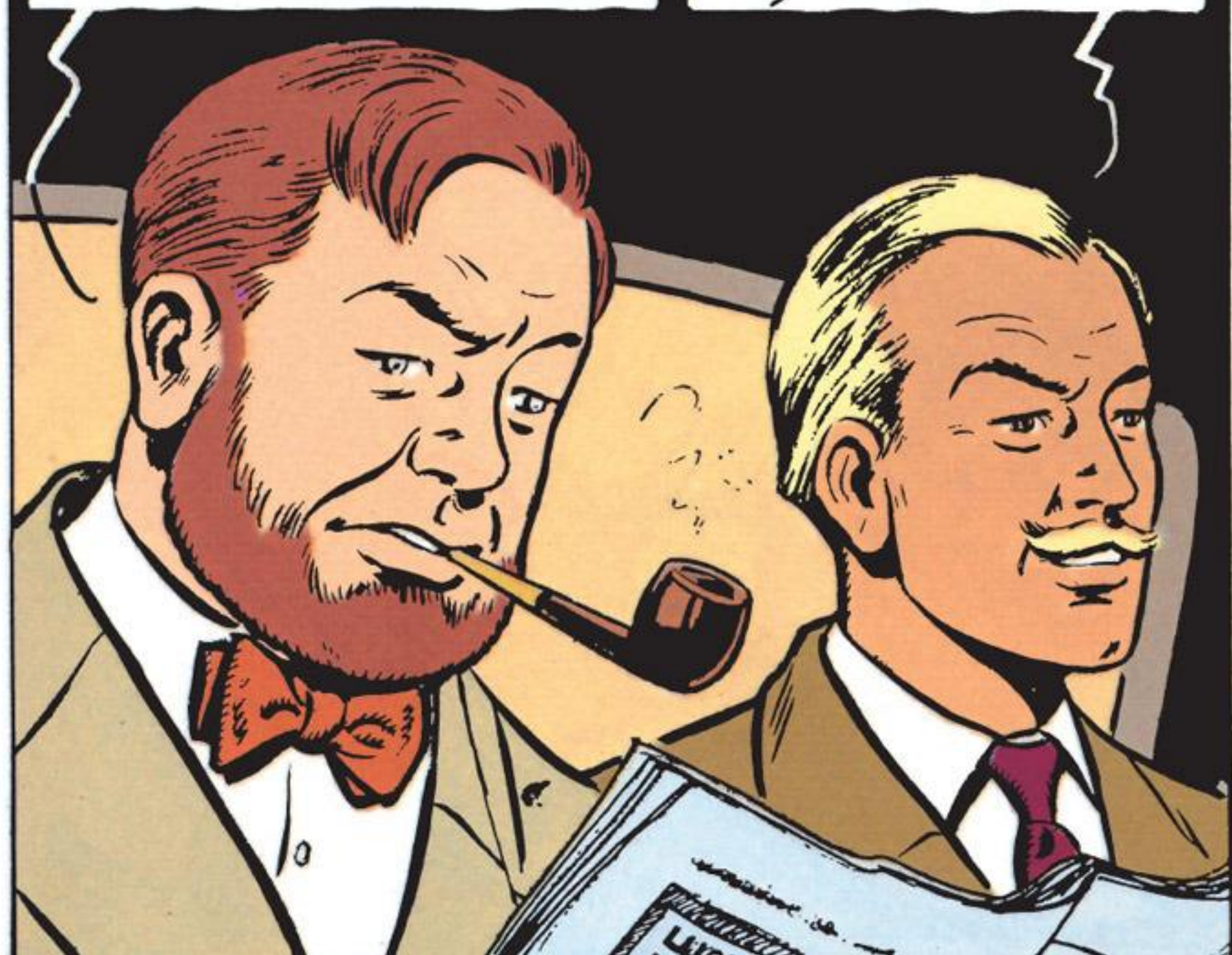


Another stop!? Ah! We should have taken the previous flight... or at least the underground!



Indeed! At this rate, we'll never make it to the Courts on time!

Which would greatly disappoint our dear old friend Olrik!



Speaking of him, how is he doing?

Last I heard, he was busy studying Parisian archaeology. It seems that he read through every book in the library of La Santé*!



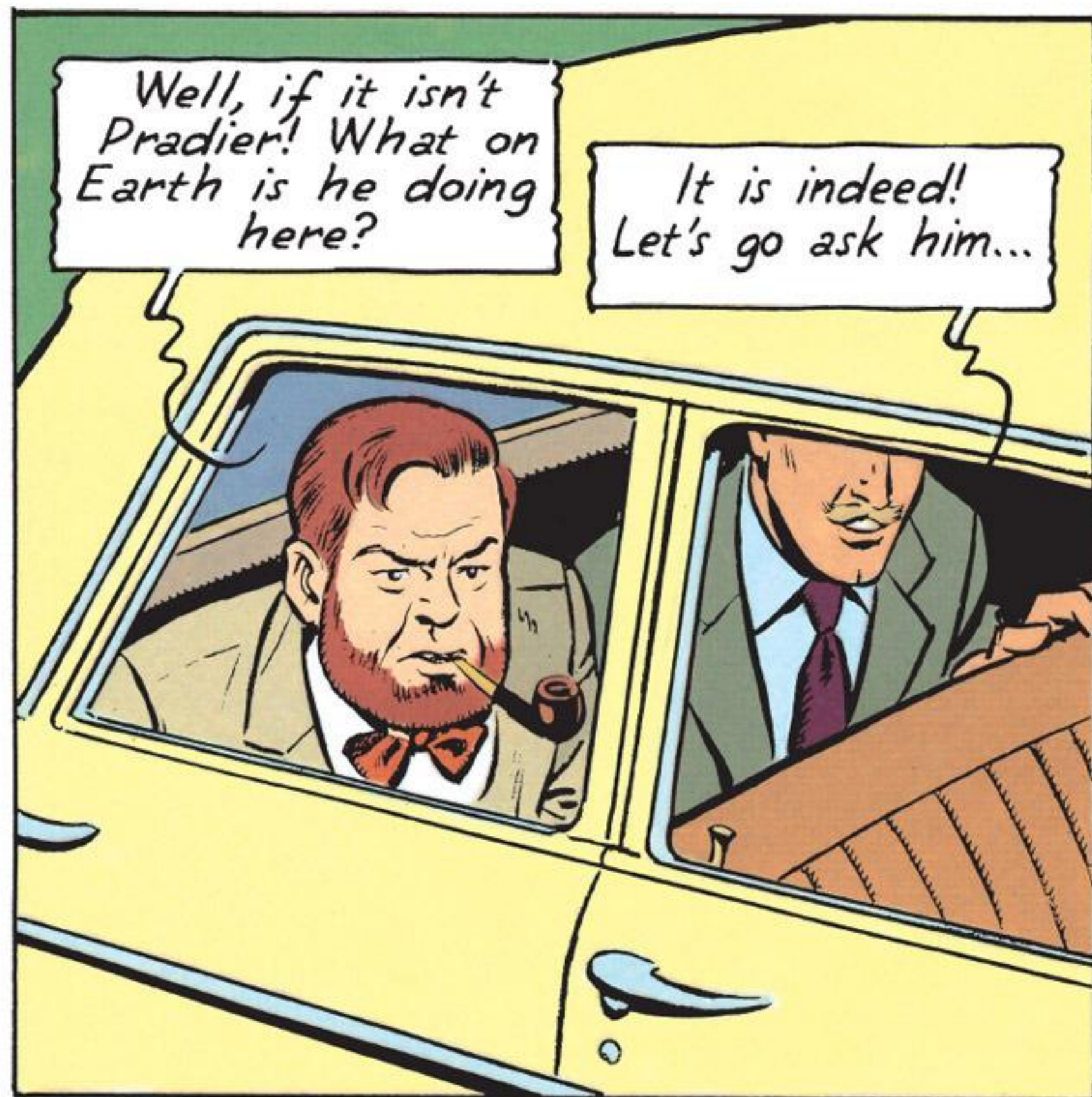
BUT THE TAXI HAS STOPPED ONCE AGAIN...

Well, driver, what's going on?

Police! This time we're stuck here for a good while!



*PRISON DE LA SANTÉ: FAMOUS PRISON IN THE CENTRE OF PARIS



Well, if it isn't Pradier! What on Earth is he doing here?

It is indeed! Let's go ask him...



Hello, Pradier!

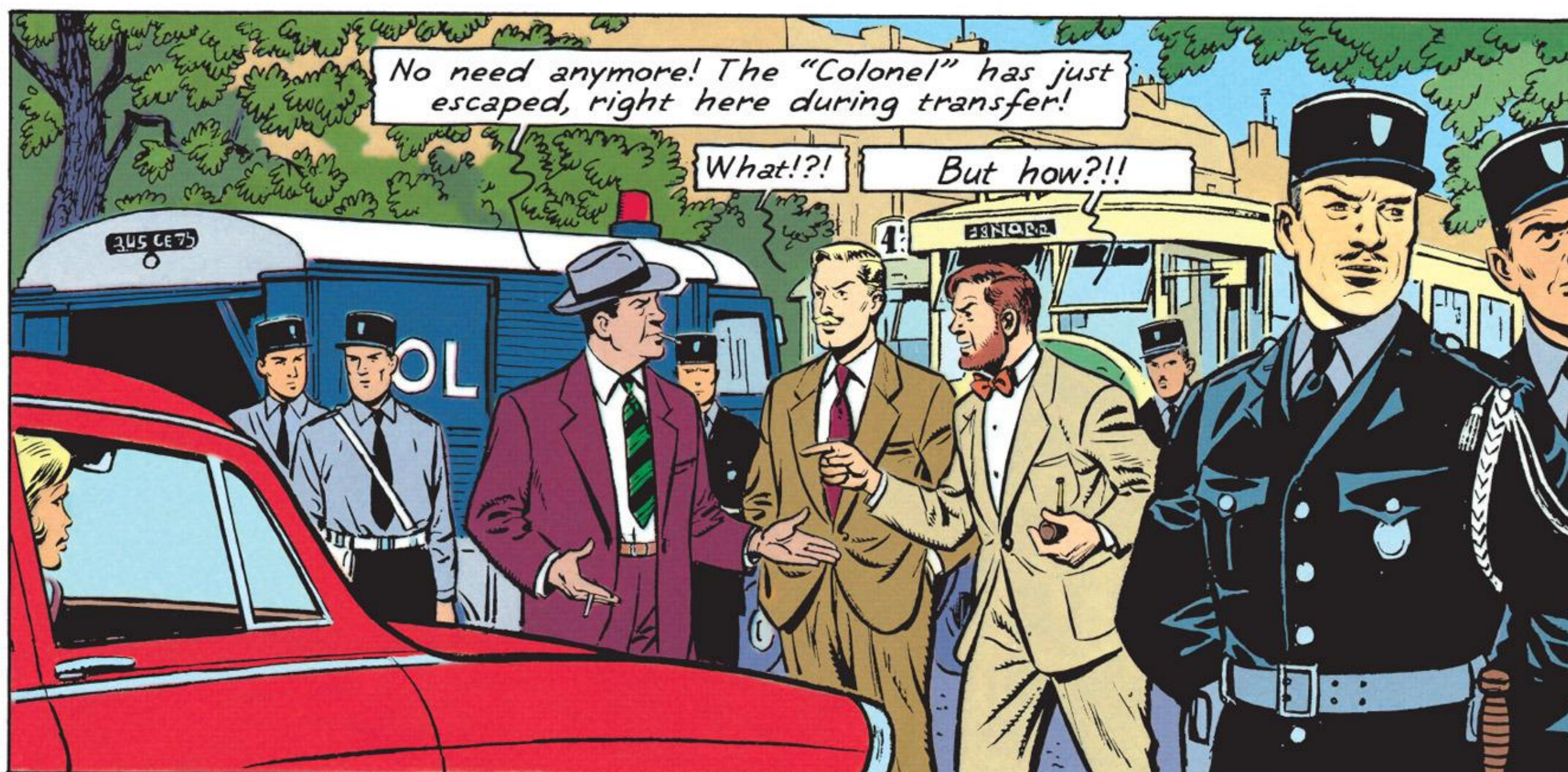
Is this how you direct traffic?



Well, I'll be...! That's what I call good timing!

How so? I thought we were supposed to meet at the Courts...

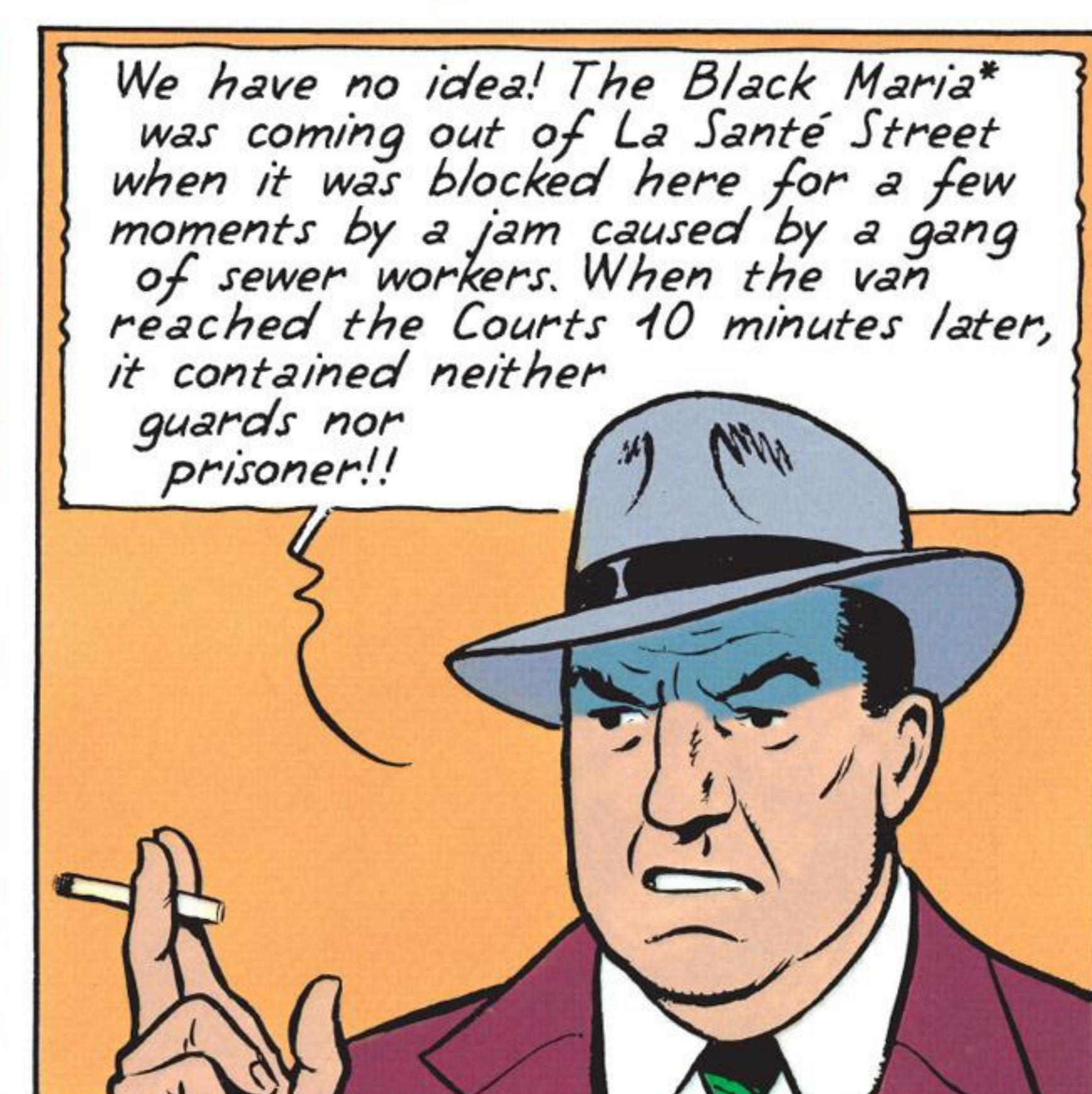
... for the confrontation with Olrik...



No need anymore! The "Colonel" has just escaped, right here during transfer!

What!?!?

But how?!?



We have no idea! The Black Maria* was coming out of La Santé Street when it was blocked here for a few moments by a jam caused by a gang of sewer workers. When the van reached the Courts 10 minutes later, it contained neither guards nor prisoner!!



Hmm. Sewer workers operating in the middle of traffic at rush hour?

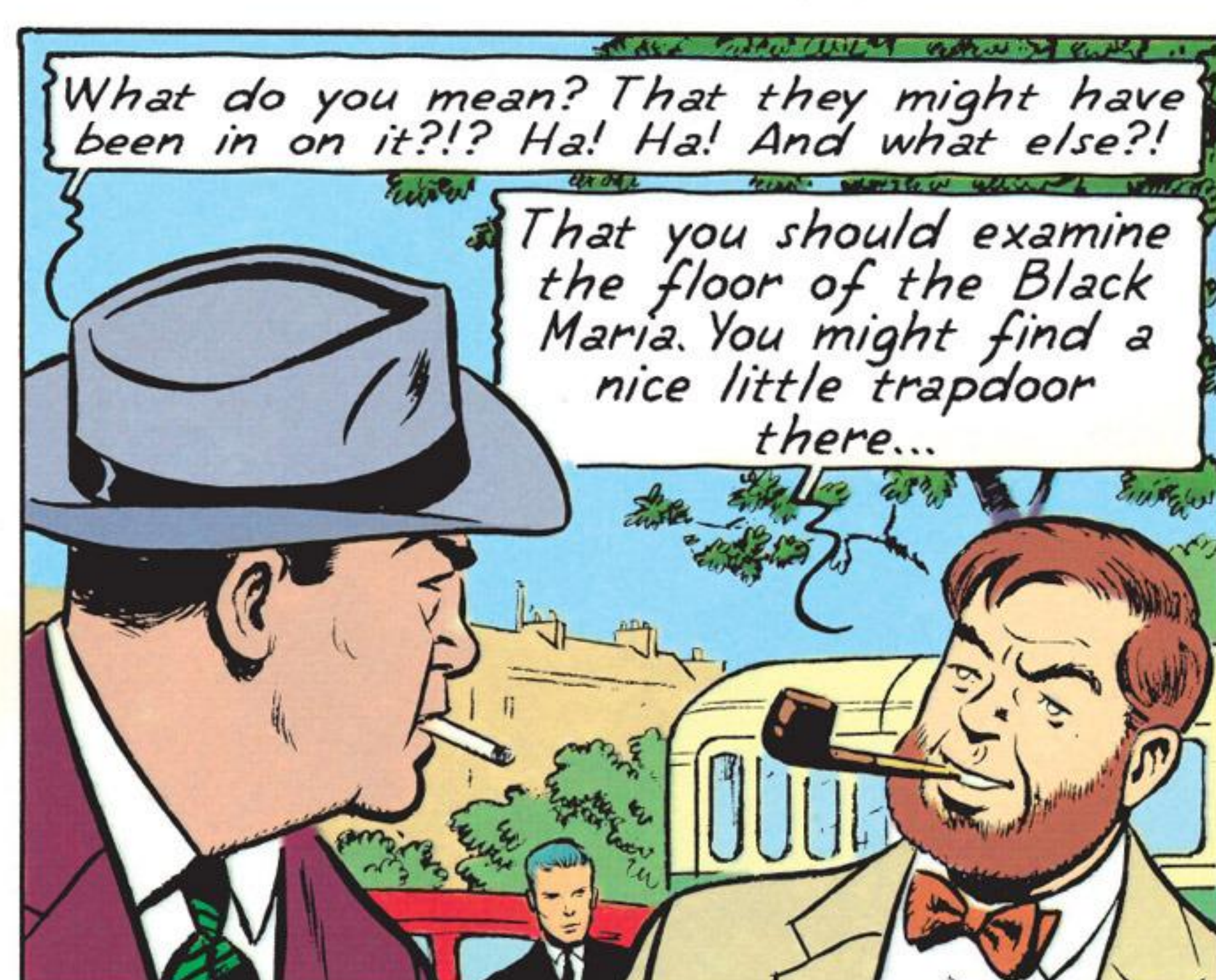
That's Civil Services in all their glory!

And... where are these men now?



Obviously they must have gone back to their depot...

Well, if I were you, I'd check as soon as possible!



What do you mean? That they might have been in on it?!? Ha! Ha! And what else?!

That you should examine the floor of the Black Maria. You might find a nice little trapdoor there...



What? A trapdoor?!

... A trapdoor that could have something to do with... this sewer grate here... Do you see where I'm going with this?



Now look here, Professor, are you pulling my leg!?!?



Oh, I would never dare, Commissioner! But time is of the essence, and...

... and since, officially, we are still under summons... We'll leave you to your investigation!

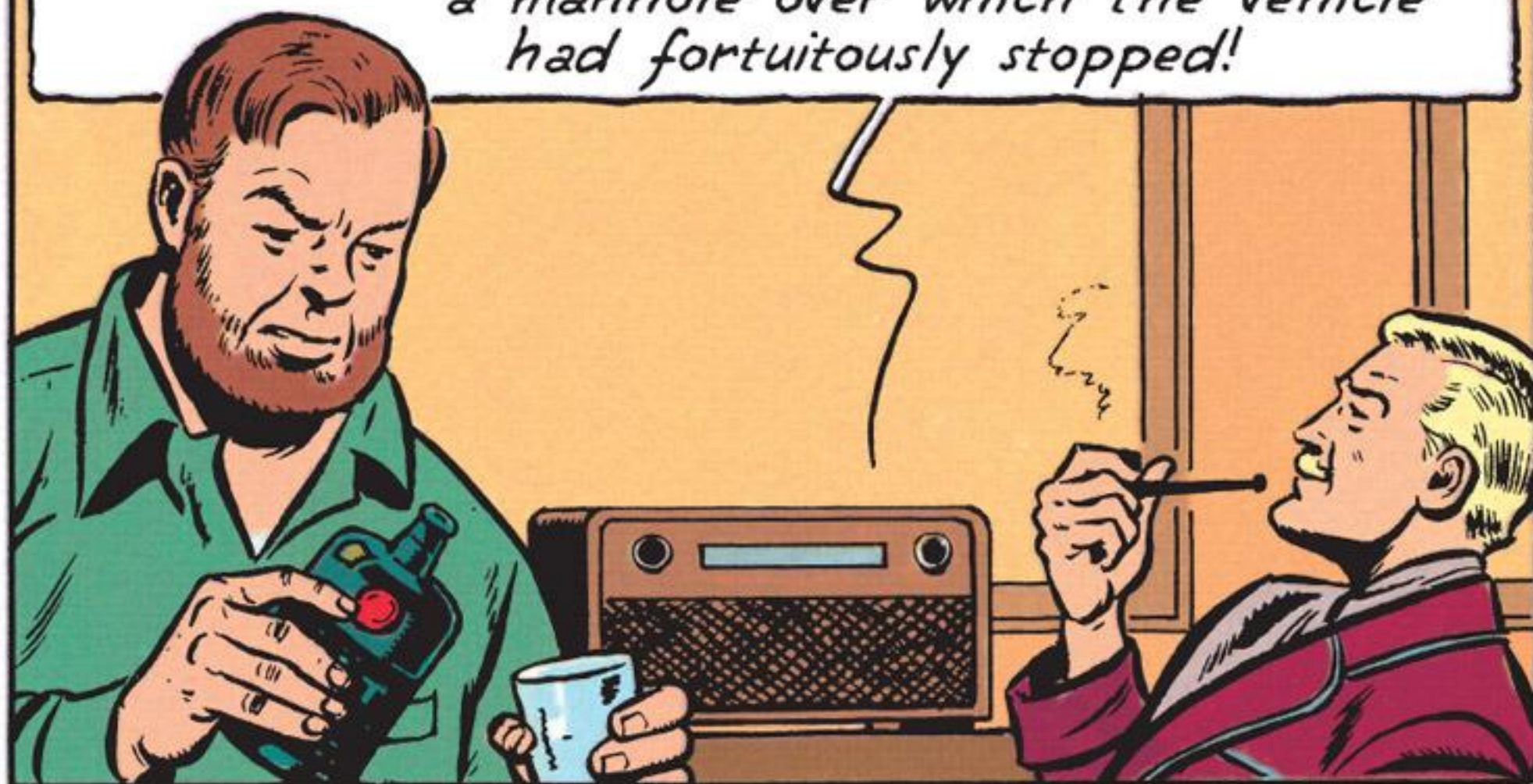
Right! Still, thanks for the suggestions!

*SLANG FOR A POLICE VAN USED TO TRANSPORT PRISONERS

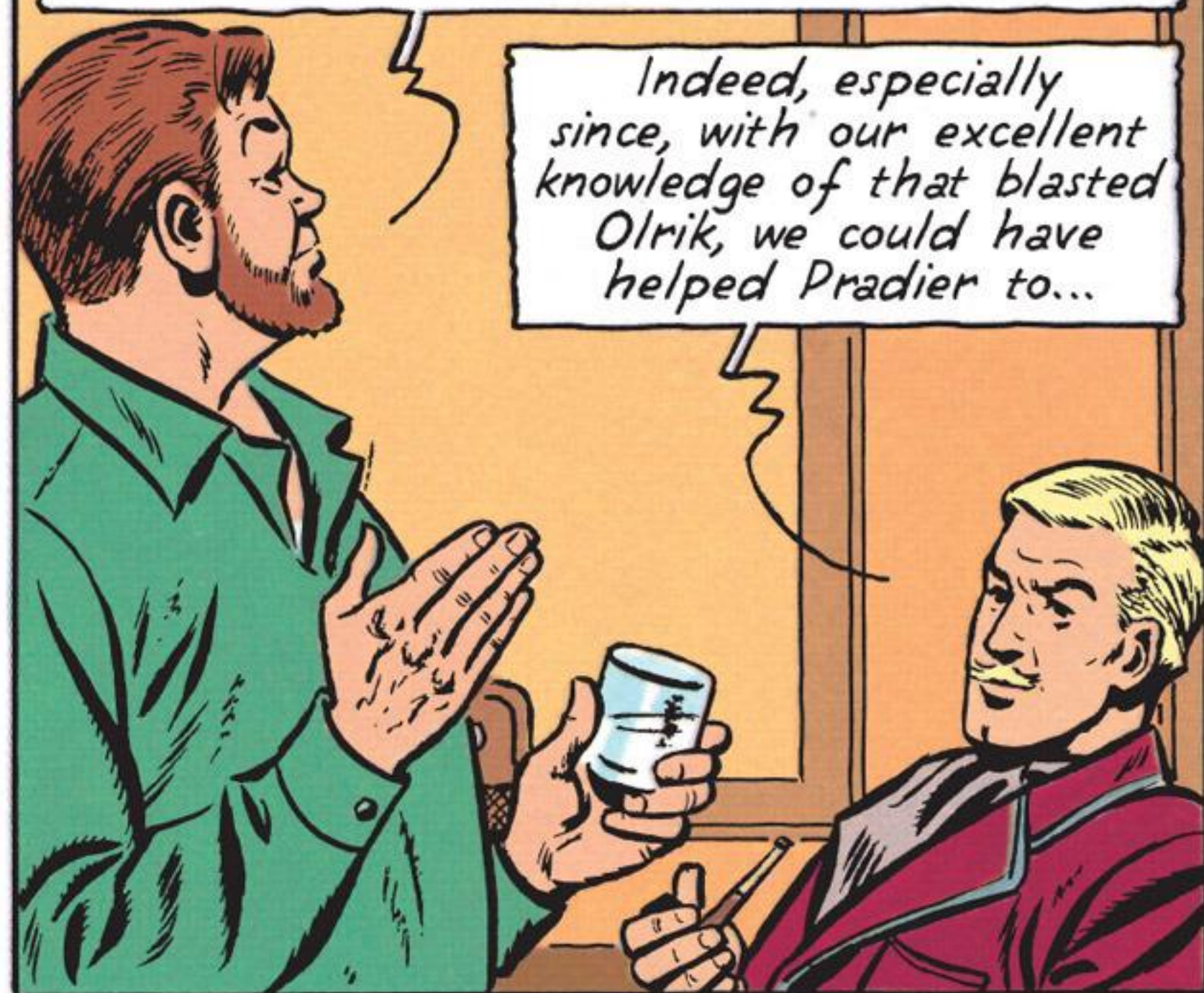
THE NEXT EVENING, IN THE LOUVOIS HOTEL, AS THE FRENCH RADIO NEWS GIVES THE LATEST INFORMATION...



... As we had anticipated in our previous broadcast, Commissioner Pradier's investigation into the ruffian Olrik's fantastic escape has confirmed Captain Blake and Professor Mortimer's bold theory! It was determined that the police van had indeed been surreptitiously equipped with a trapdoor, that two fake guards had boarded it, and that, thanks to a perfectly timed traffic jam, the outlaw had managed to slip down into a manhole over which the vehicle had fortuitously stopped!

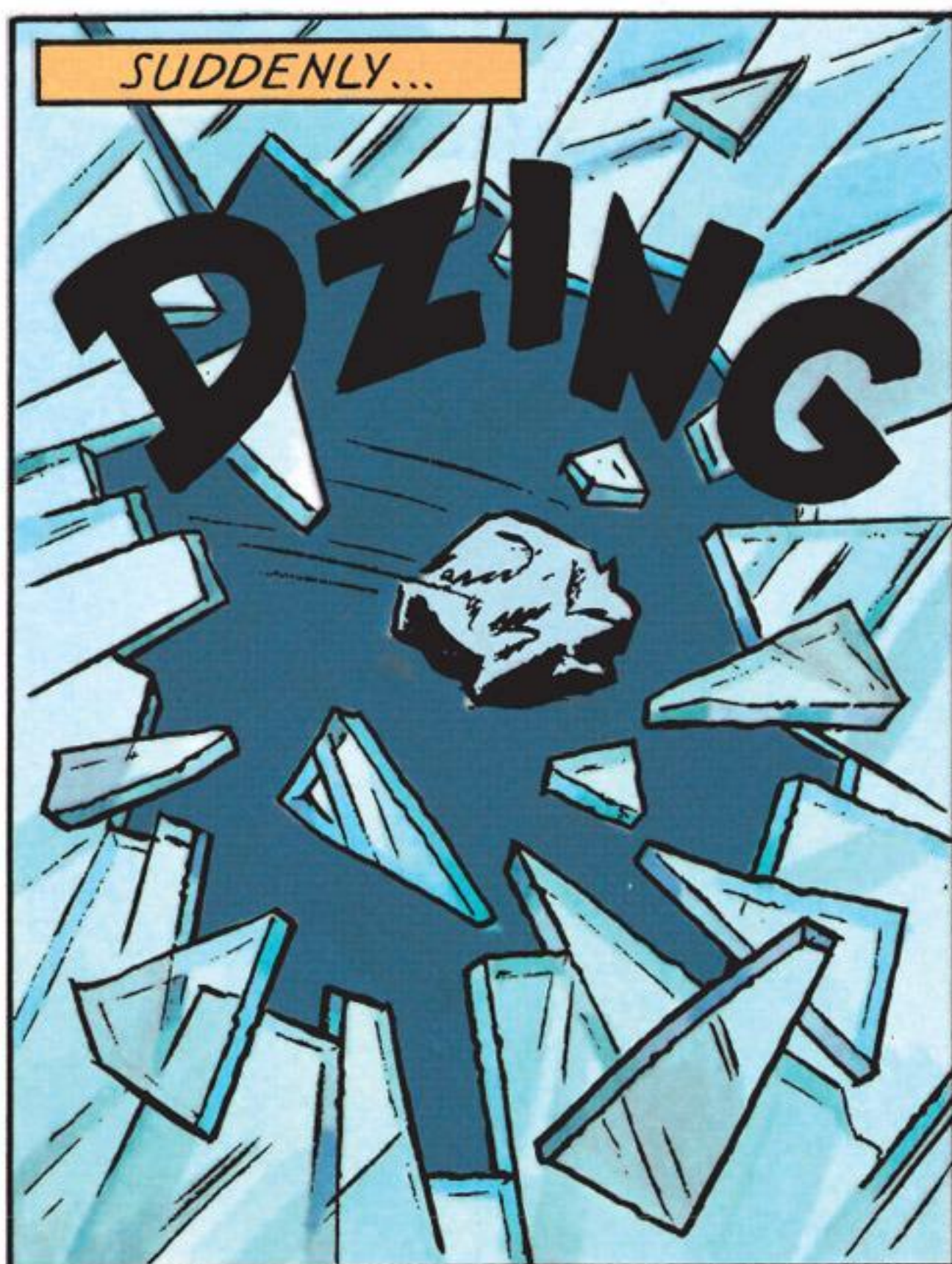


... There! As easy as that!... Too bad we're expected in London... I would have liked to follow this investigation closely...



Indeed, especially since, with our excellent knowledge of that blasted Olrik, we could have helped Pradier to...

SUDDENLY...



A WINDOW HAS JUST BEEN SHATTERED BY A PROJECTILE, WHICH BOUNCES ONTO THE CARPET...



Damn!!



No one in sight, of course!

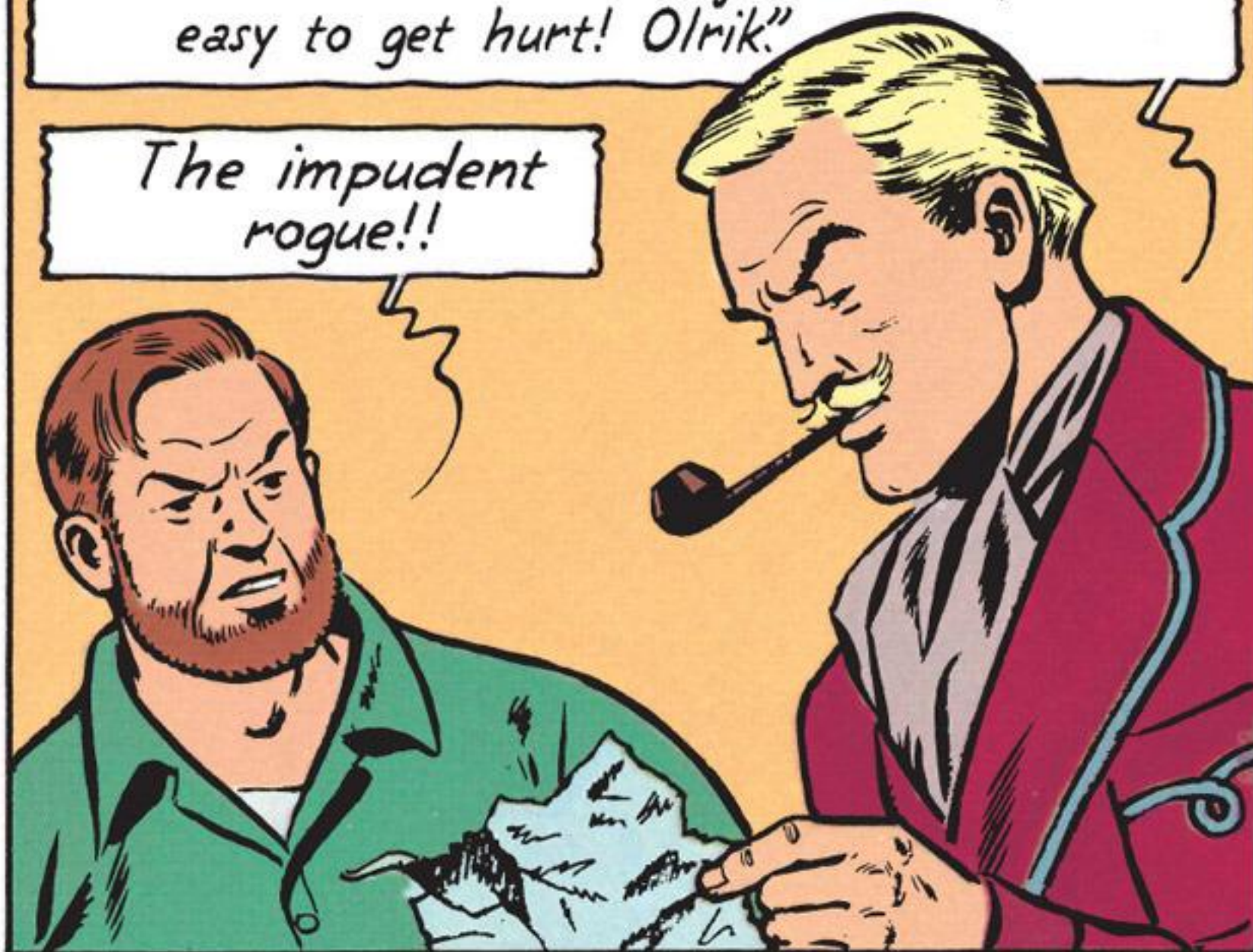
What is it?

A rock wrapped in a message...



Listen to this: "I hear that Sherlock/Blake and Watson/Mortimer are about to beat a prudent retreat and leave dear Commissioner Pradier to go it alone? Too bad... But no matter. To each his own job. Besides, it's so easy to get hurt! Olrik!"

The impudent rogue!!

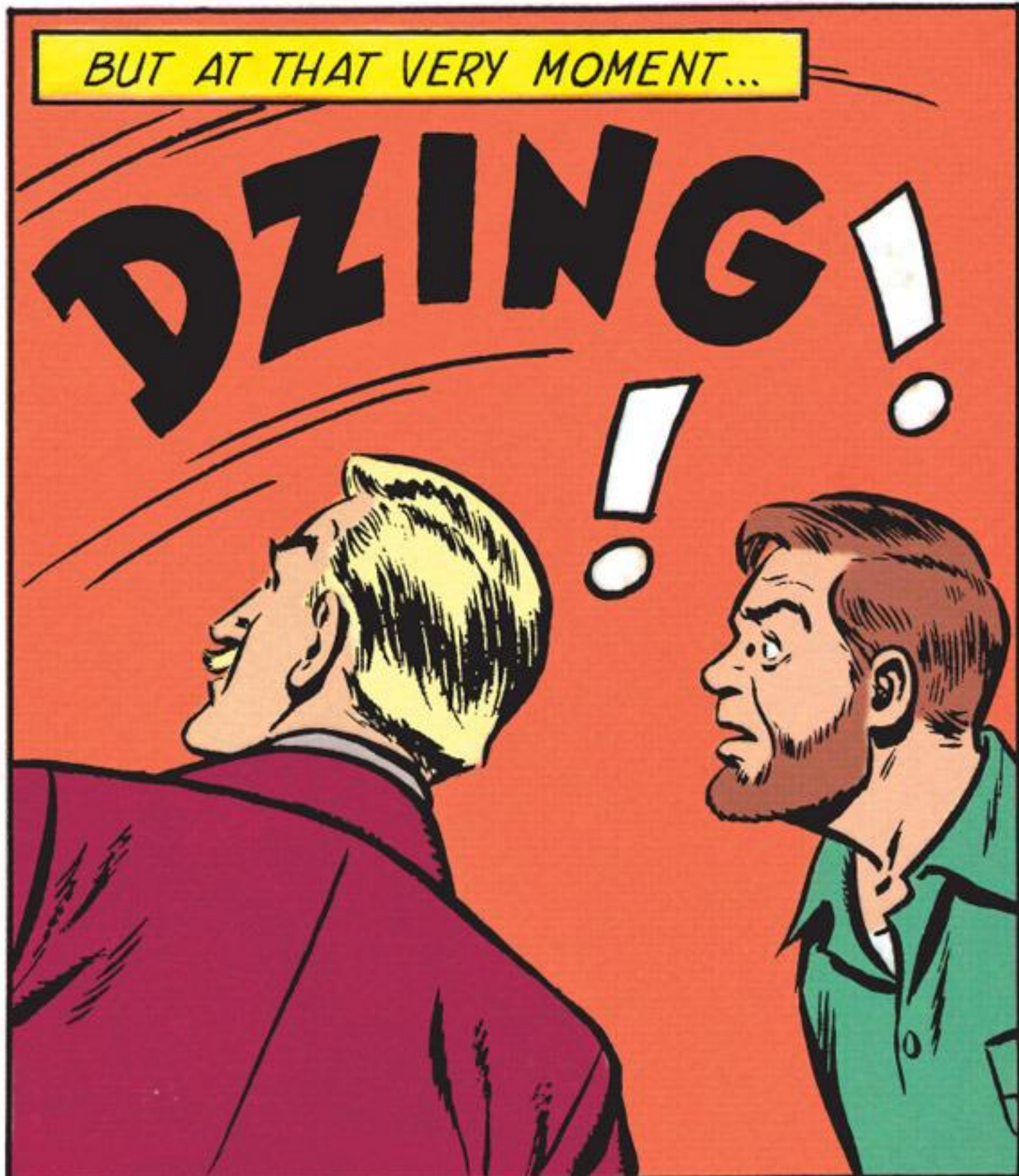


He'll pay for such insolence! As for me, my mind is made up. I'm staying so that I can make him choke on his bragging!

All right! In that case, I am staying too!



BUT AT THAT VERY MOMENT...



The insufferable cheek!

Let's see!



"Bravo, gentlemen. I expected nothing less from you! See you soon, then!! Olrik!"

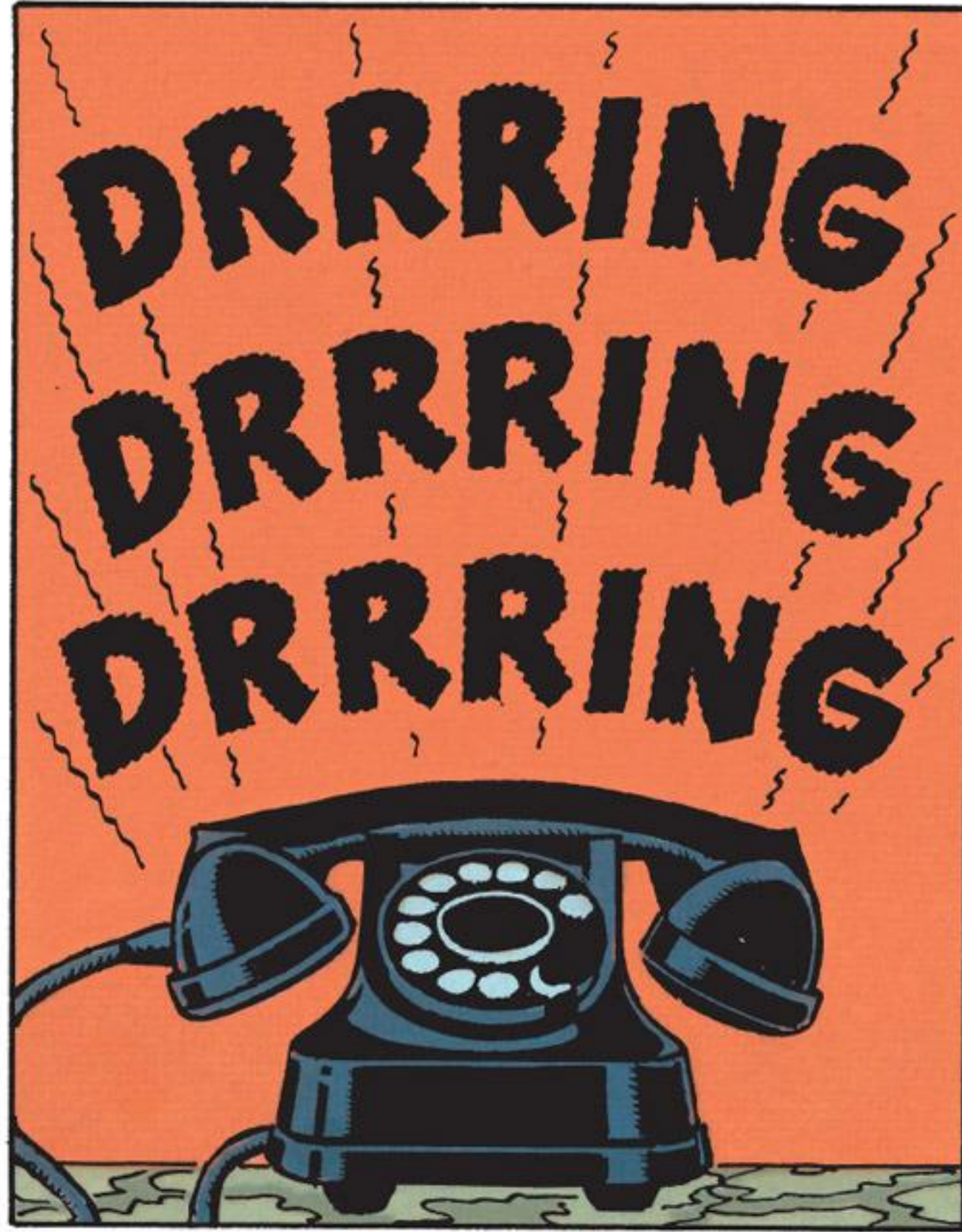
It's almost as if he'd read our minds!



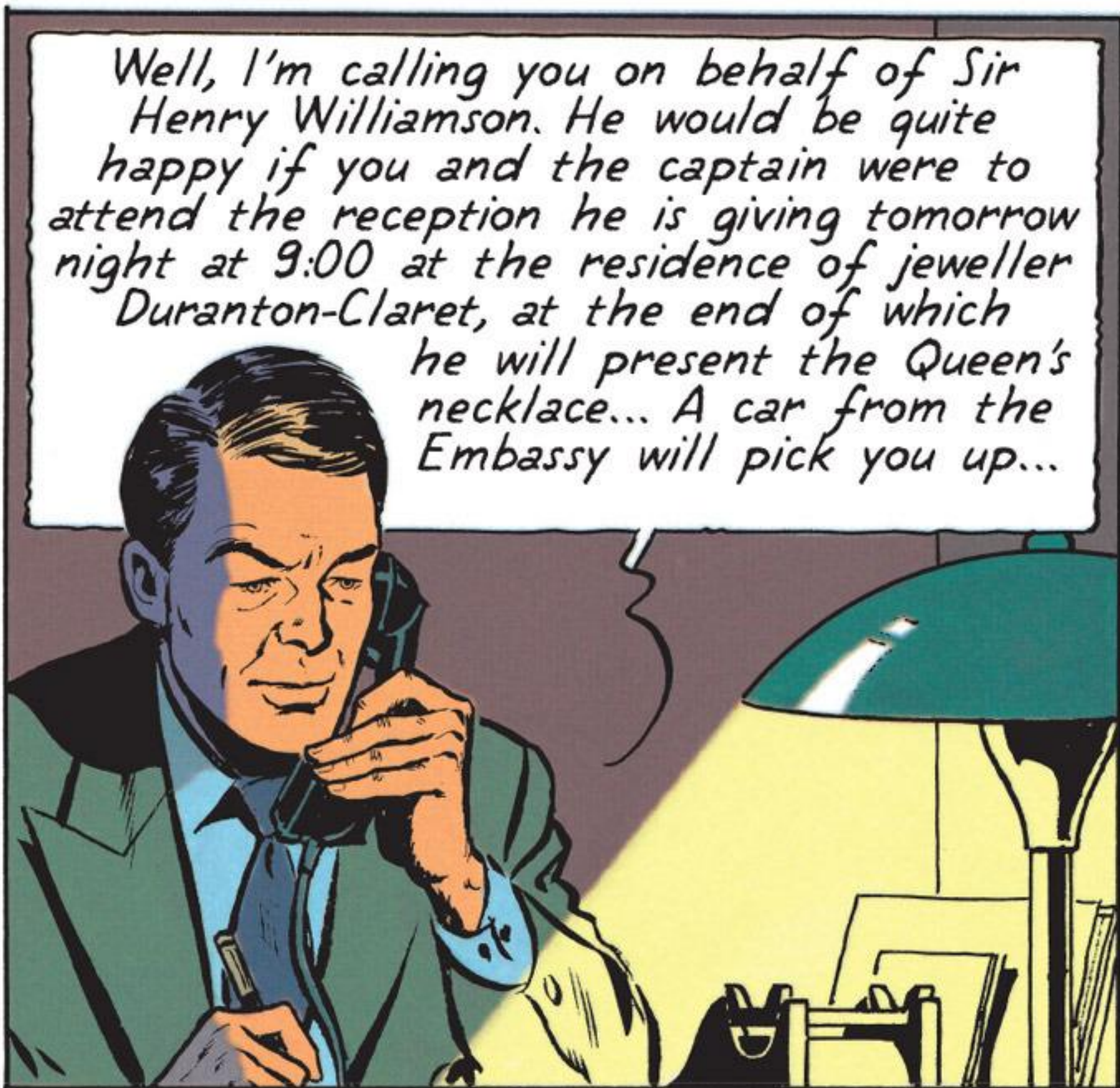


Erm! I'm more of the idea that he's hidden somewhere across the street, spying on our every move and thumbing his nose at us...

We'll see who has the last laugh!



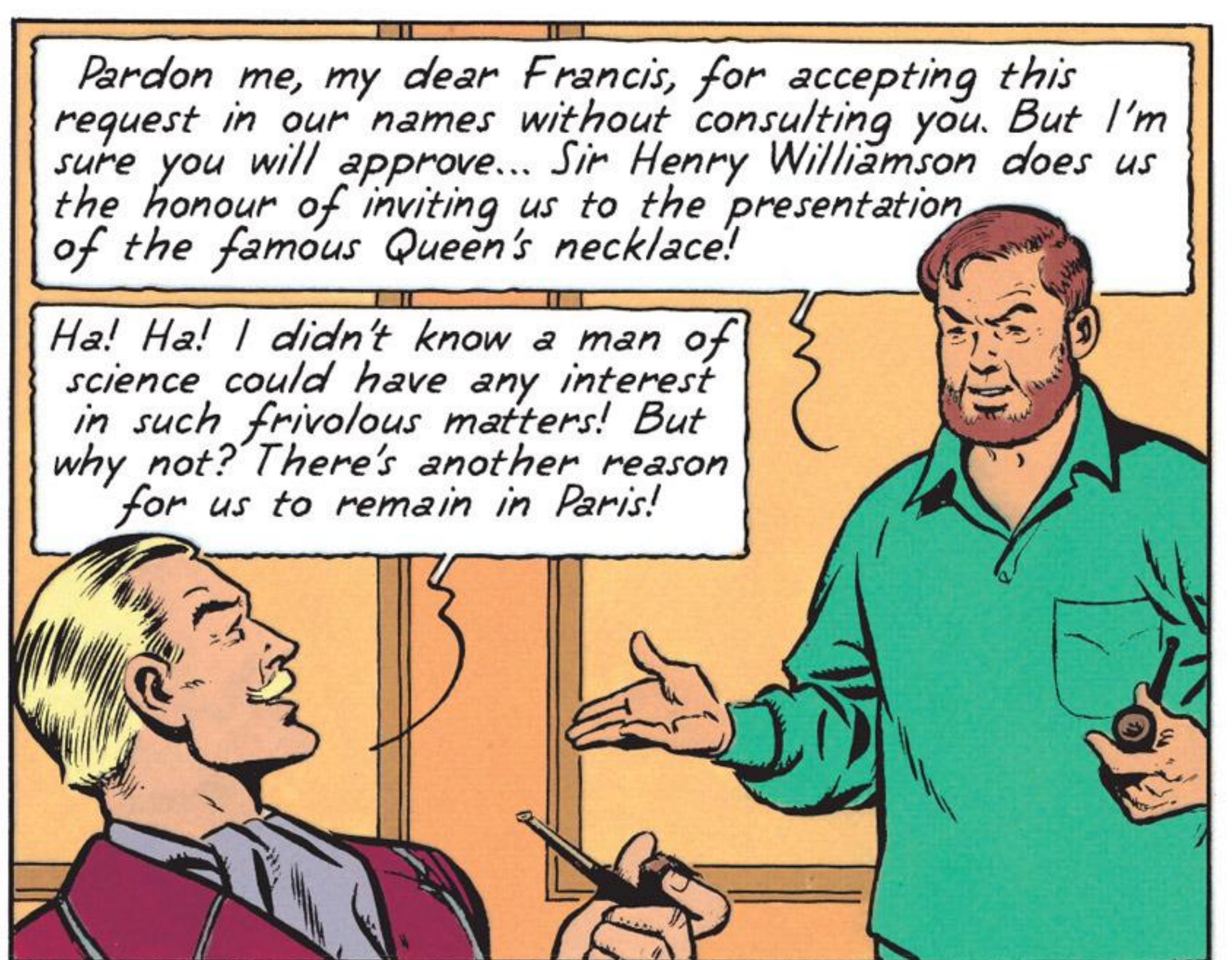
Hello! Yes... Harry Adams...? Our friendly cultural attaché... How do you do?



Well, I'm calling you on behalf of Sir Henry Williamson. He would be quite happy if you and the captain were to attend the reception he is giving tomorrow night at 9:00 at the residence of jeweller Duranton-Claret, at the end of which he will present the Queen's necklace... A car from the Embassy will pick you up...



That'll be fine, then... Please thank Sir Henry for his kind invitation. He can count on our presence... Good night...



Pardon me, my dear Francis, for accepting this request in our names without consulting you. But I'm sure you will approve... Sir Henry Williamson does us the honour of inviting us to the presentation of the famous Queen's necklace!

Ha! Ha! I didn't know a man of science could have any interest in such frivolous matters! But why not? There's another reason for us to remain in Paris!



THE NEXT EVENING, AN ENDLESS LINE OF CARS FILES BEFORE THE FAMOUS PARISIAN JEWELLER'S TOWN HOUSE, BRINGING GUESTS... AMONG THOSE, OUR FRIENDS BLAKE AND MORTIMER...

Some cars... Talk about a reception!

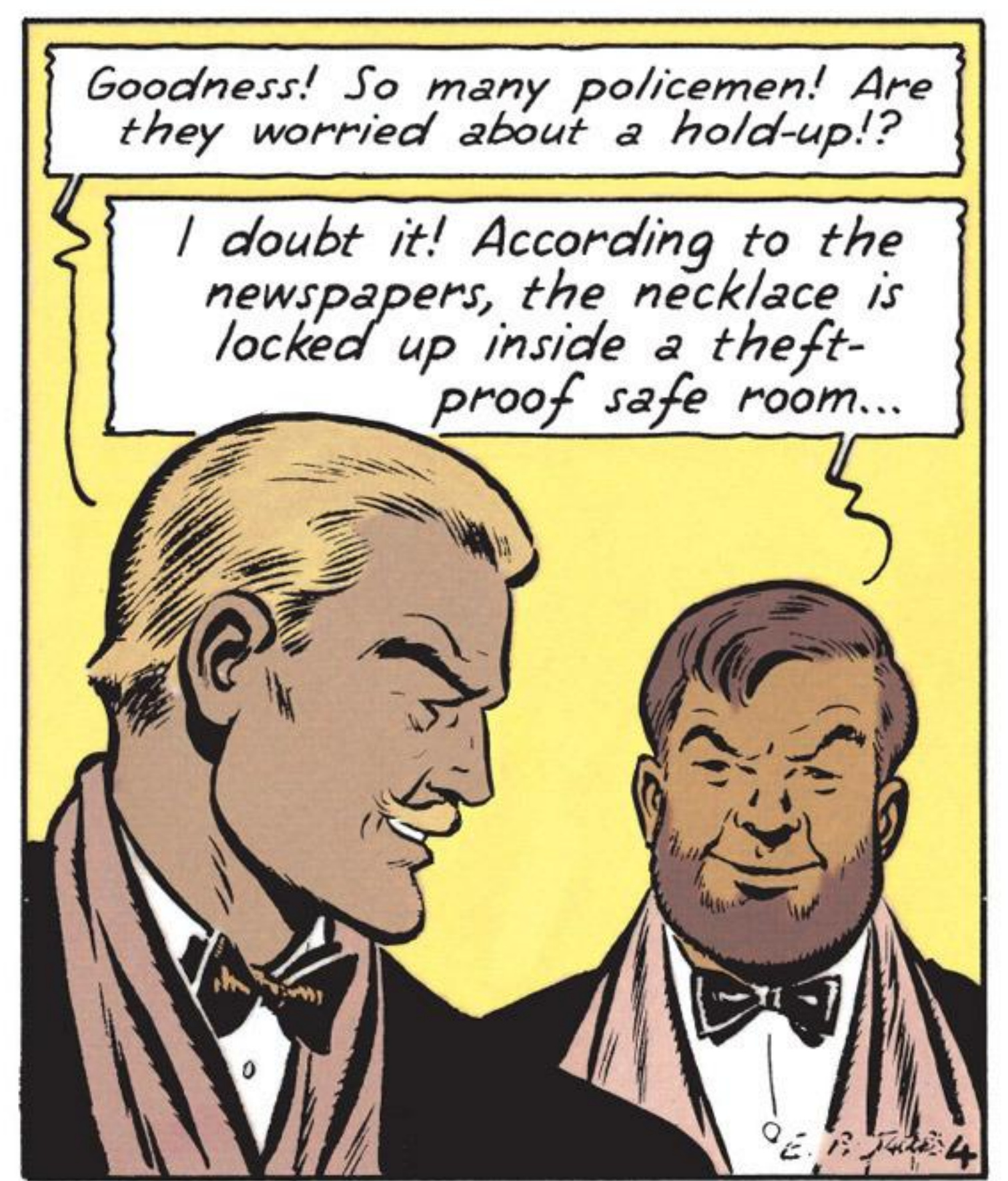
Blimey! Anyone who's anyone is here...

Think of what they're gonna stuff down their gullets!



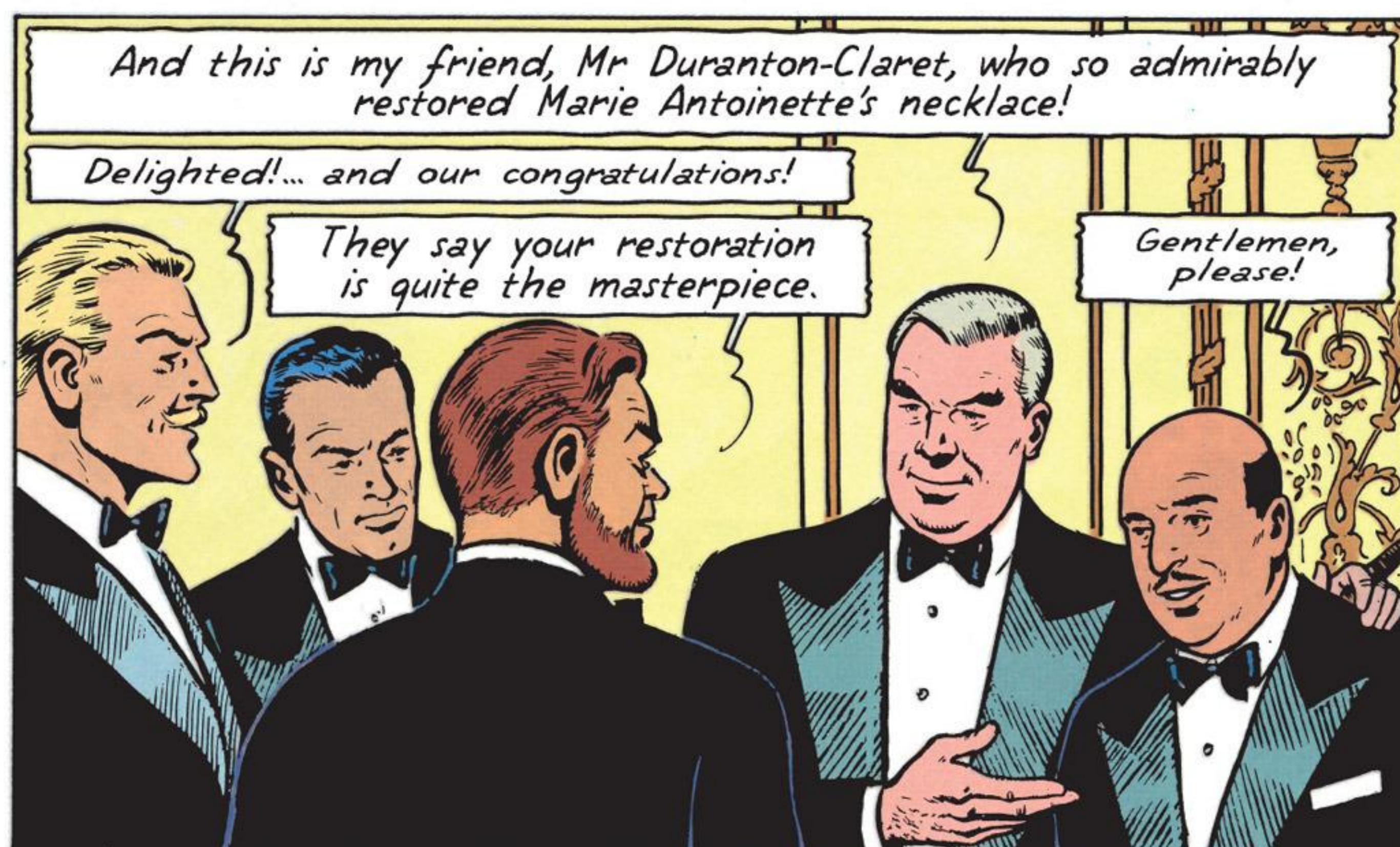
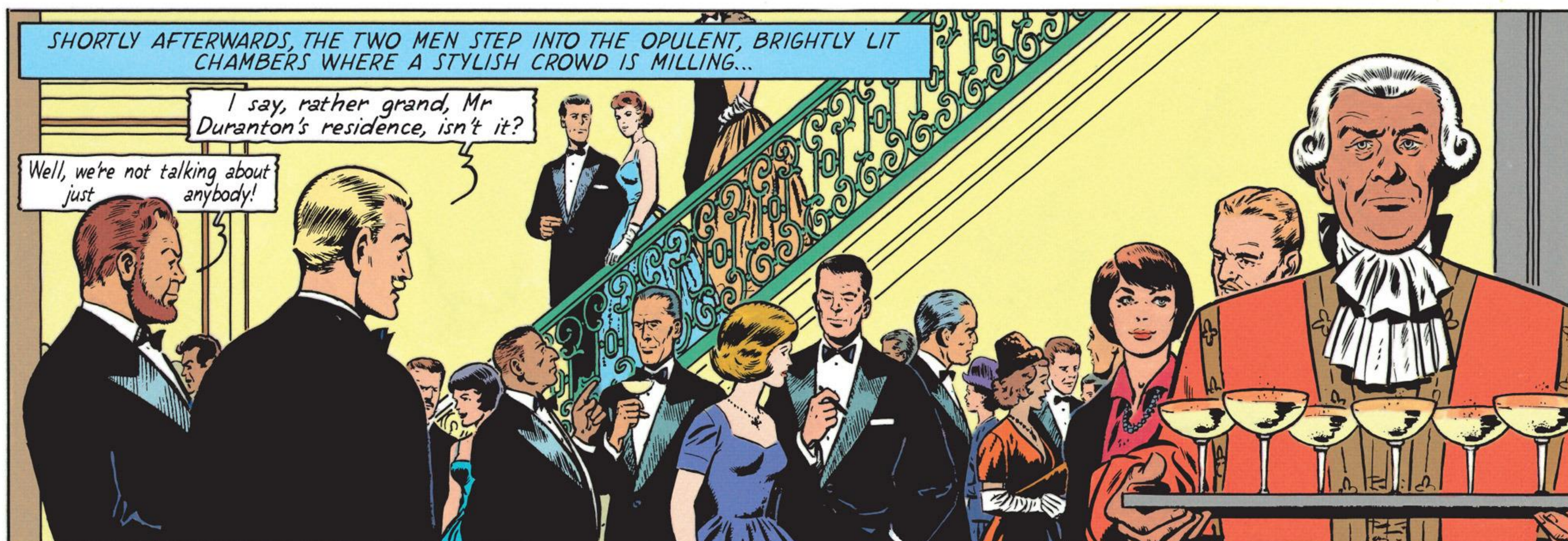
Look! It's an Embassy car...

Hey! But that's Professor Mortimer and the very distinguished Captain Blake!



Goodness! So many policemen! Are they worried about a hold-up!?

I doubt it! According to the newspapers, the necklace is locked up inside a theft-proof safe room...



*SEE SOS METEORS.

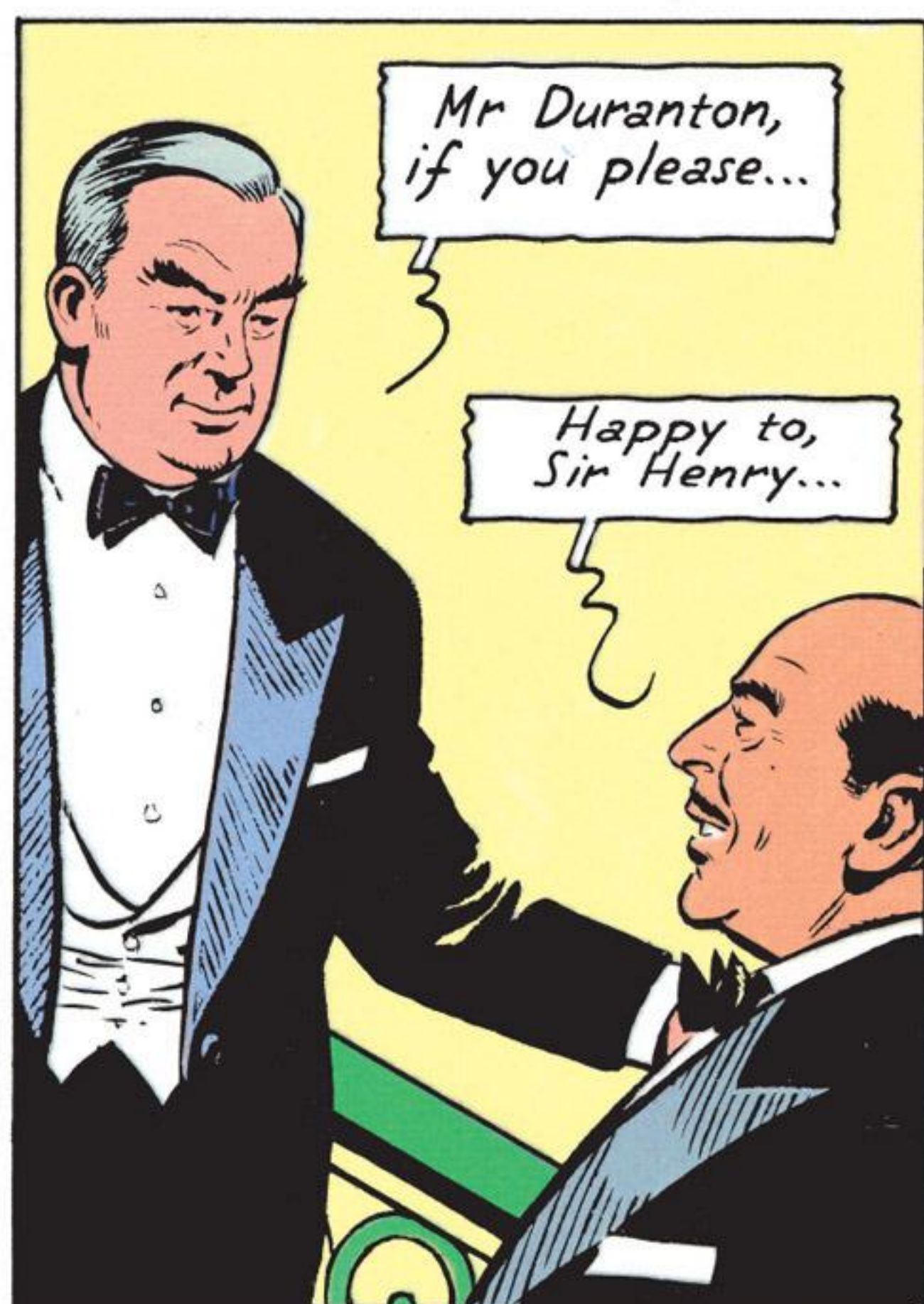


Ladies and gentlemen, please...



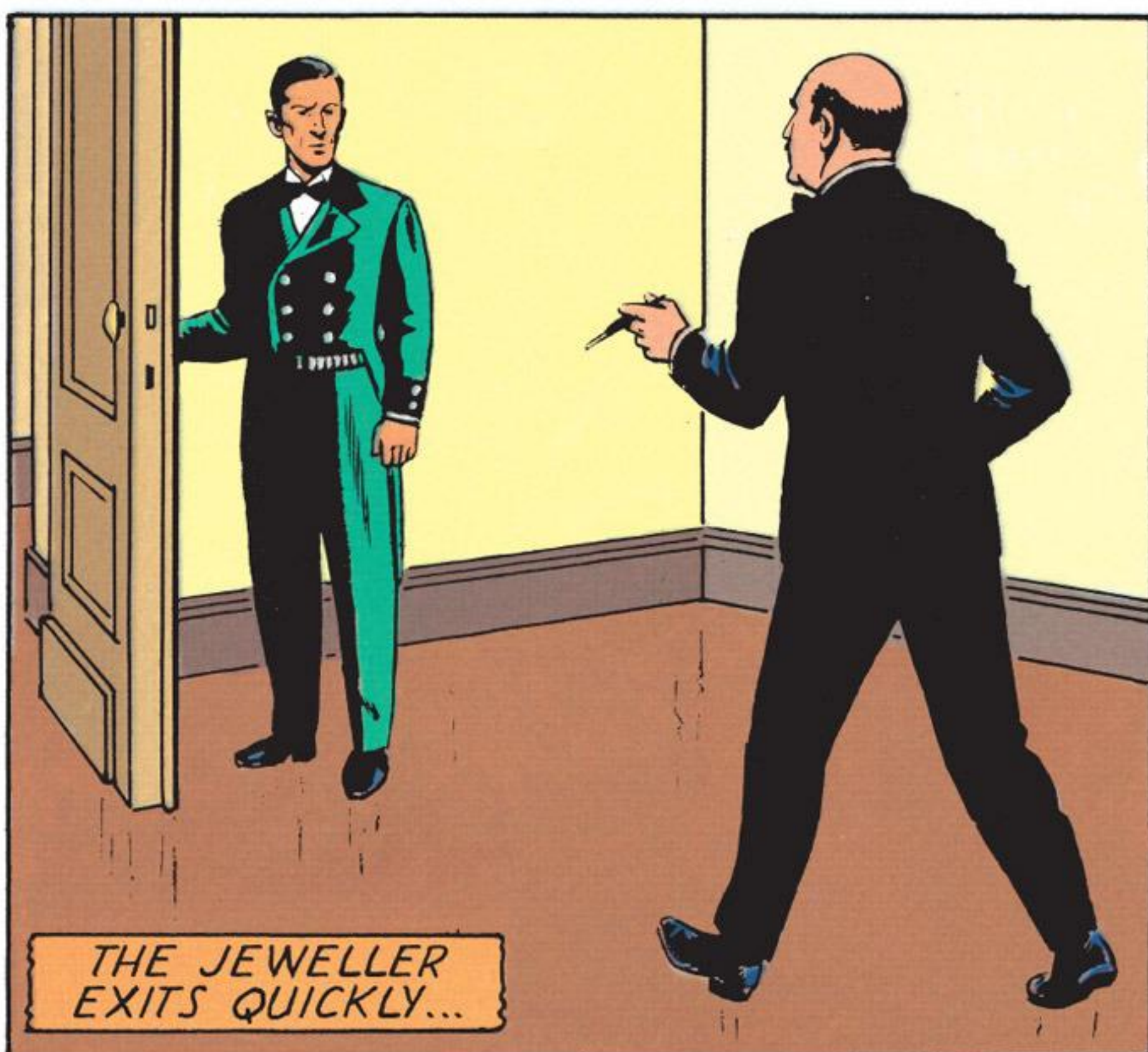
HEARING SIR HENRY'S CALL, THE CROWD OF GUESTS HAS CONVERGED TOWARDS HIM...

We shall not keep you waiting any longer... Our host will now go and fetch the treasure that you are all burning to see: the Queen's necklace!!!



Mr. Duranton, if you please...

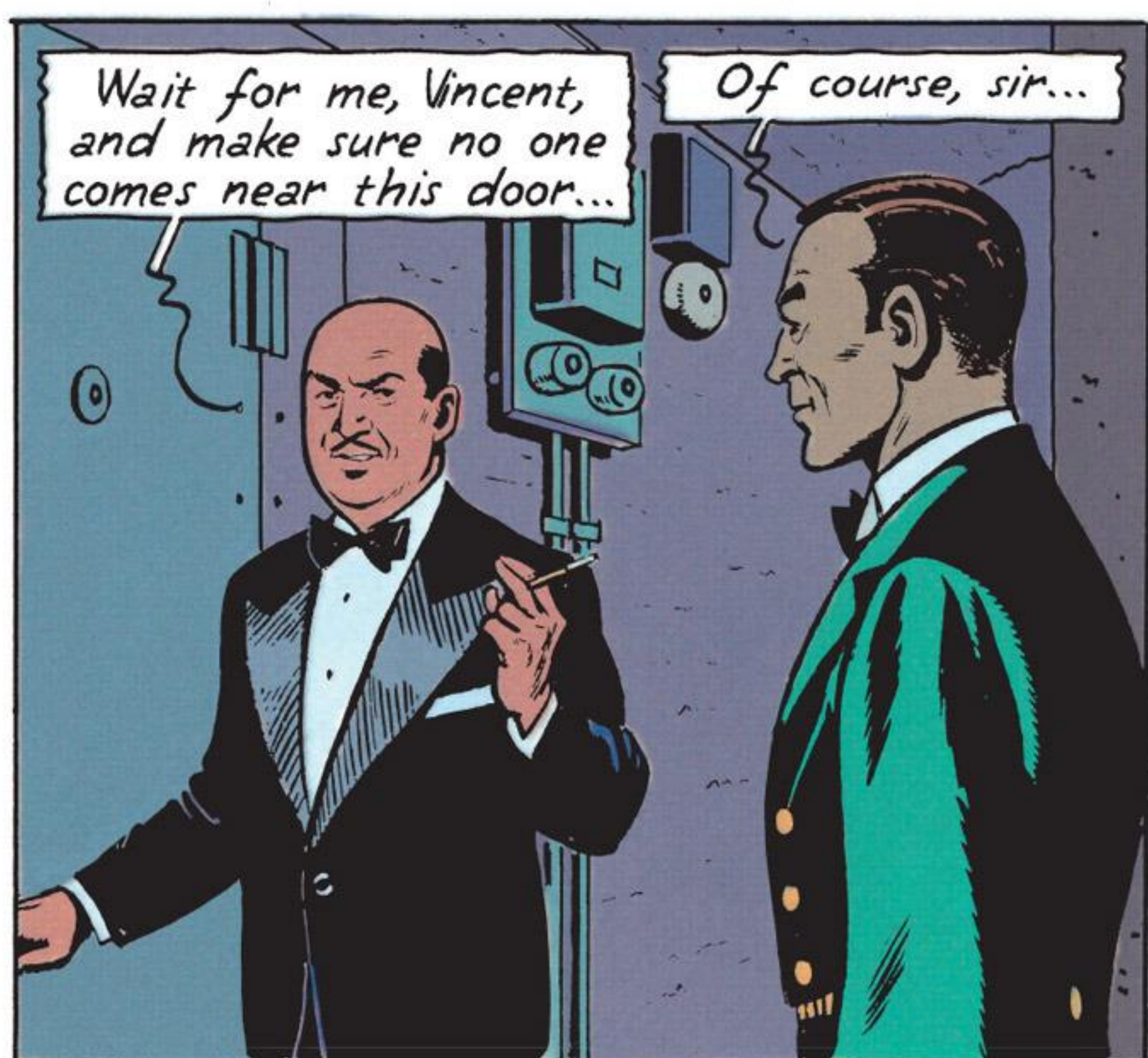
Happy to, Sir Henry...



THE JEWELLER EXITS QUICKLY...

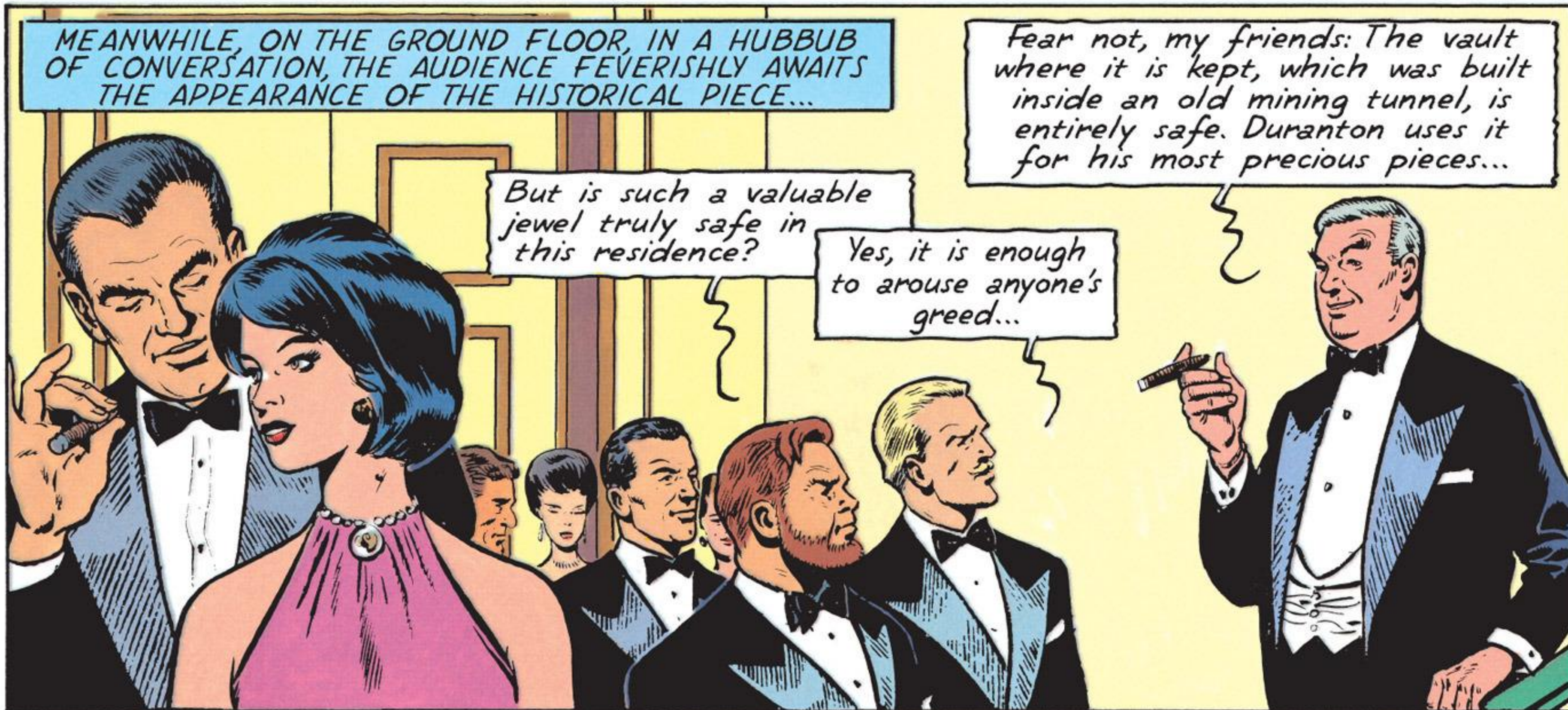


... AND, HIS MANSERVANT IN TOW, HEADS DOWN THE STAIRS TO THE BASEMENT...



Wait for me, Vincent, and make sure no one comes near this door...

Of course, sir...



MEANWHILE, ON THE GROUND FLOOR, IN A HUBBUB OF CONVERSATION, THE AUDIENCE FEVERISHLY AWAIT THE APPEARANCE OF THE HISTORICAL PIECE...

But is such a valuable jewel truly safe in this residence?

Yes, it is enough to arouse anyone's greed...

Fear not, my friends: The vault where it is kept, which was built inside an old mining tunnel, is entirely safe. Duranton uses it for his most precious pieces...



TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE DISTRACTION, SHARKEY DISCREETLY SLIPS OUT...

It's time. Let's go!



UNSEEN, HE REACHES THE ELECTRIC BOARD, AND...

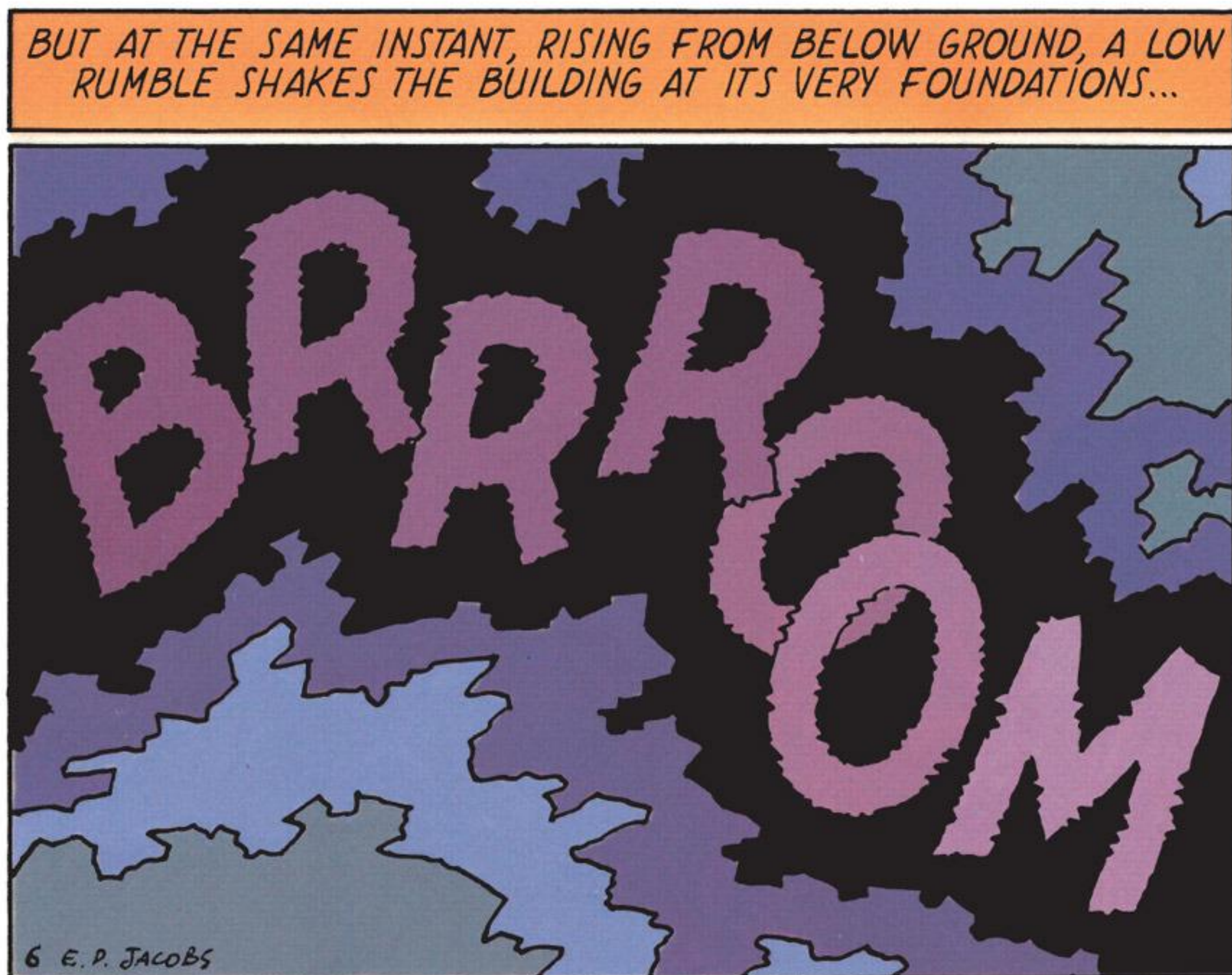


Oh, my!

Good Lord!

What's going on?

A power failure!?!



BUT AT THE SAME INSTANT, RISING FROM BELOW GROUND, A LOW RUMBLE SHAKES THE BUILDING AT ITS VERY FOUNDATIONS...

6 E. P. JACOBS

NIPPING THE NASCENT PANIC IN THE BUD,
TWO SMALL FLAMES APPEAR...



BLAKE AND MORTIMER HAVE INSTANTLY
THOUGHT OF USING THEIR LIGHTERS...



First, find the board!

Ah, this servant will help us!



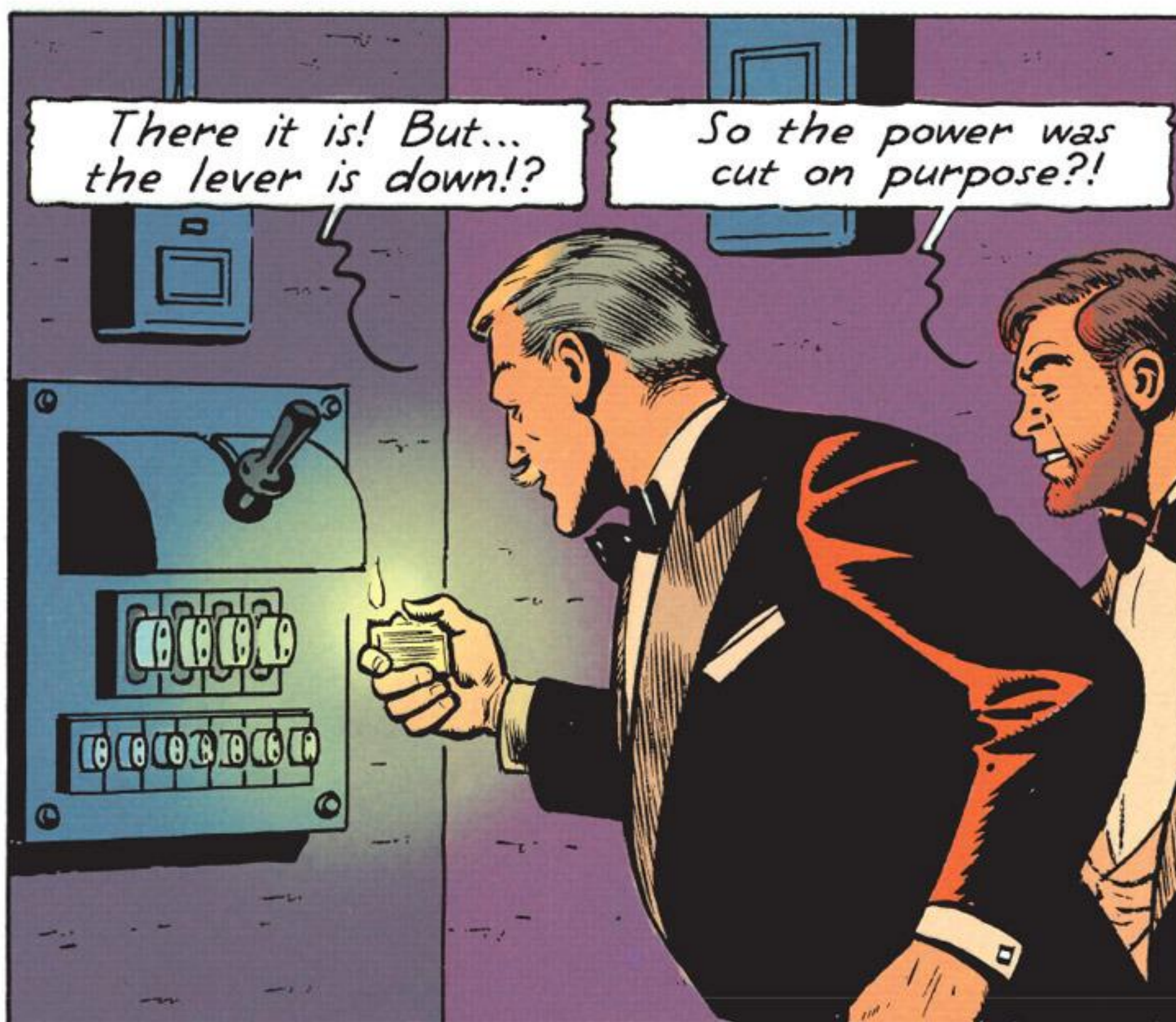
Where is the electrical board?

Er... There... At the entrance to the kitchen...



There it is! But... the lever is down!?

So the power was cut on purpose?!



Let's find out!!

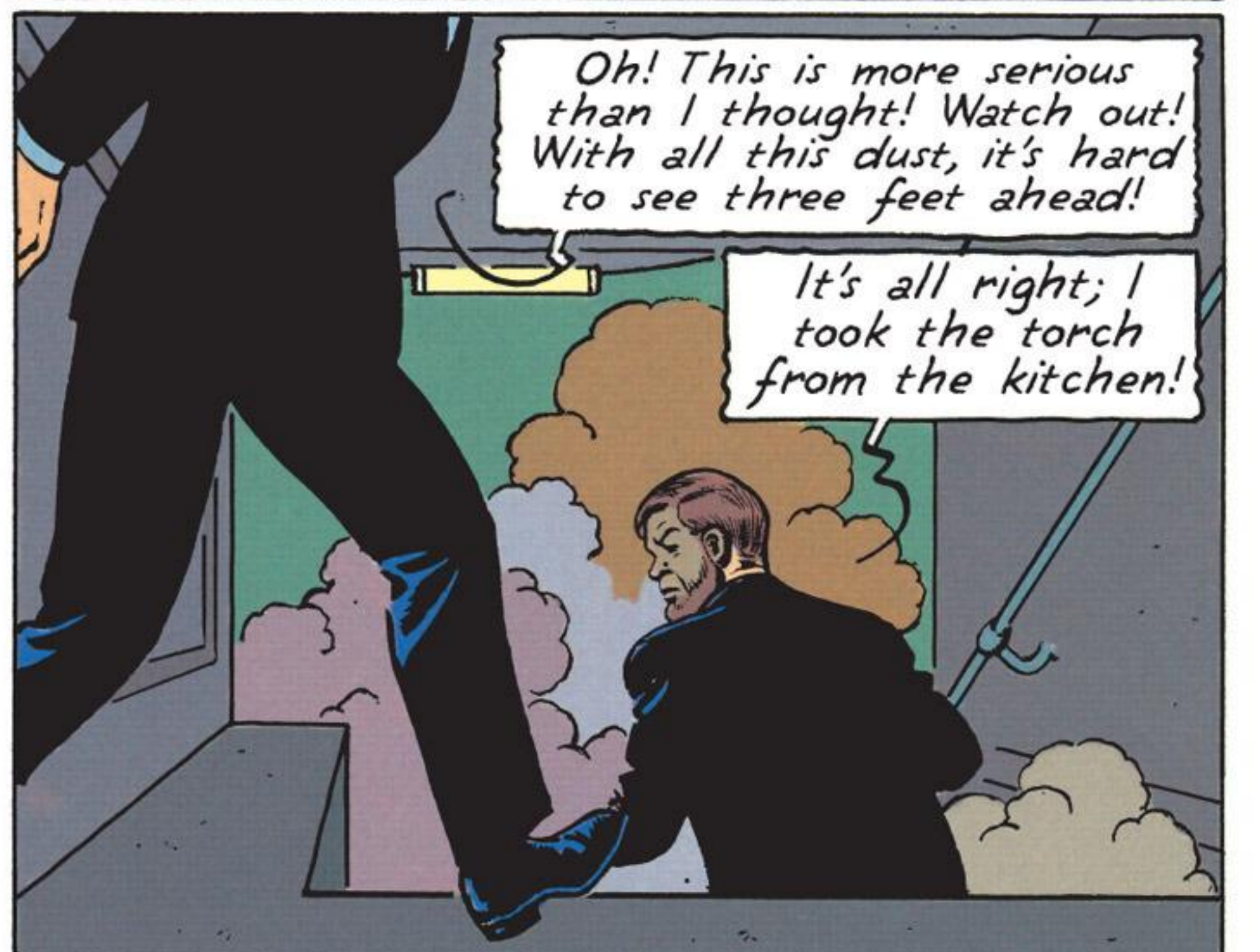
CLANG



THE LIGHTS COME BACK INSTANTLY, TO THE GUESTS' GREAT RELIEF!



MEANWHILE, WITHOUT WASTING A MOMENT, BLAKE AND MORTIMER HAVE RUSHED DOWN THE STAIRS TO THE BASEMENT...



AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS, VINCENT, STILL SHAKEN, IS LEANING AGAINST THE WALL...



Where's Durantton?

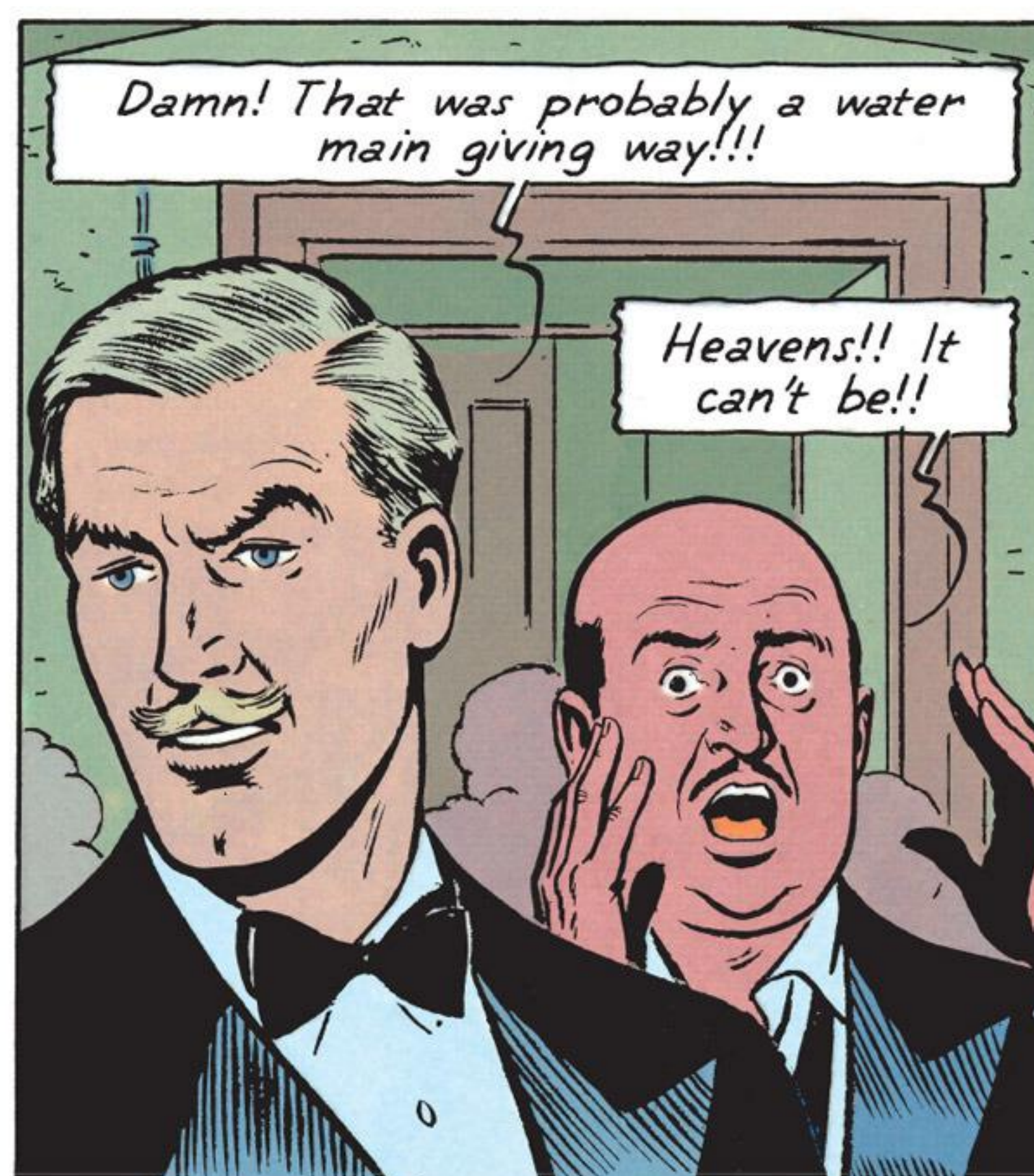
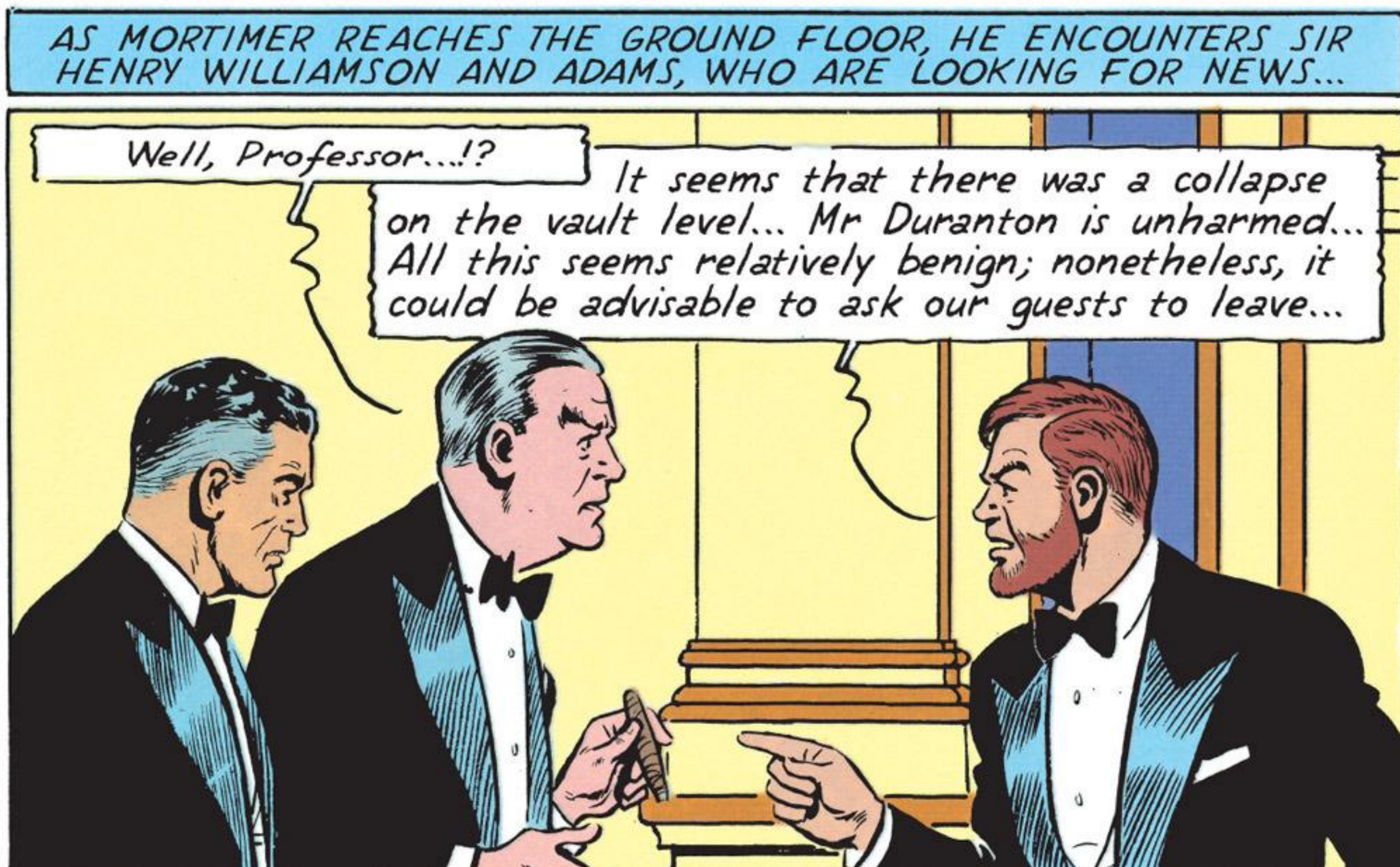
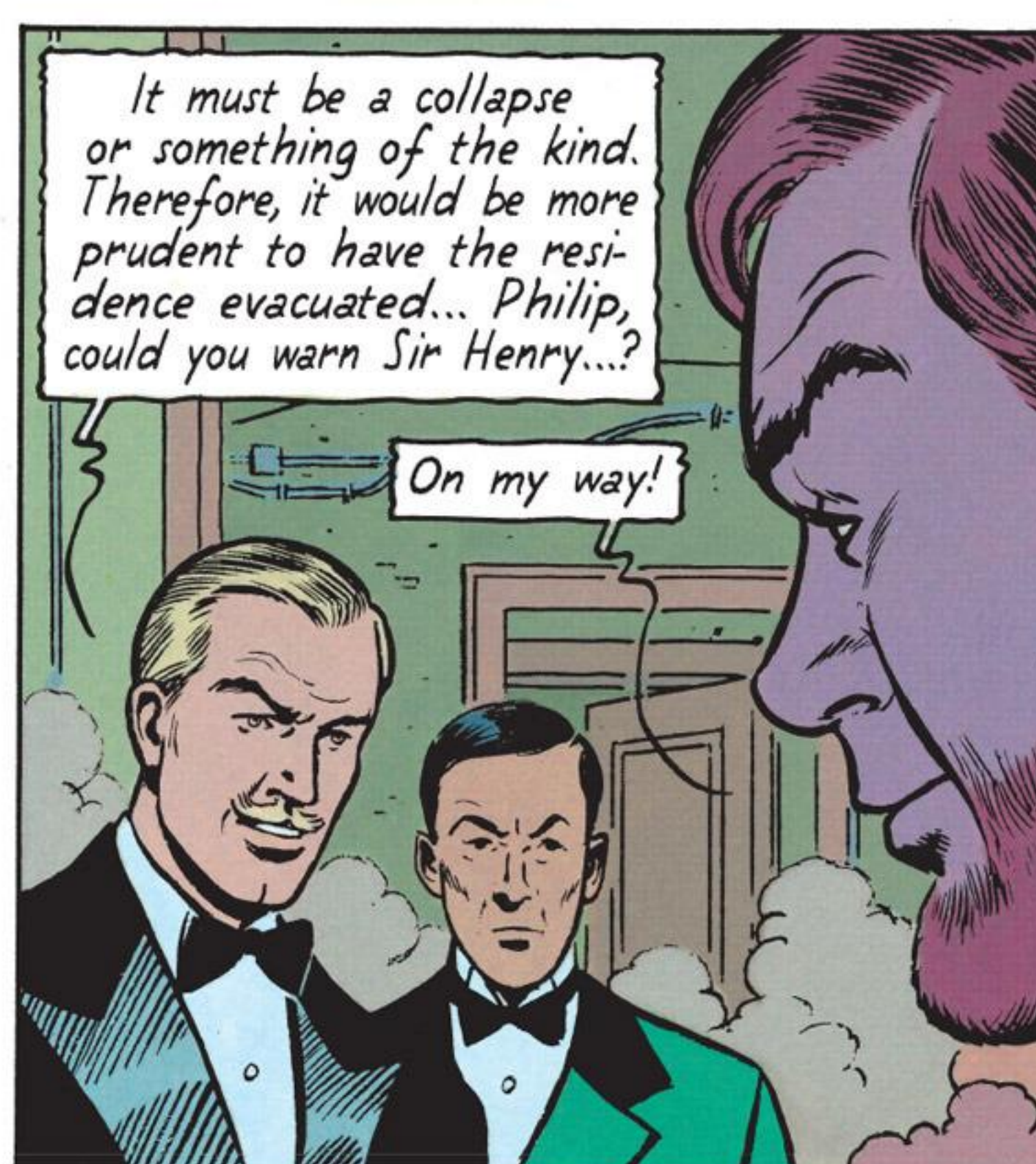
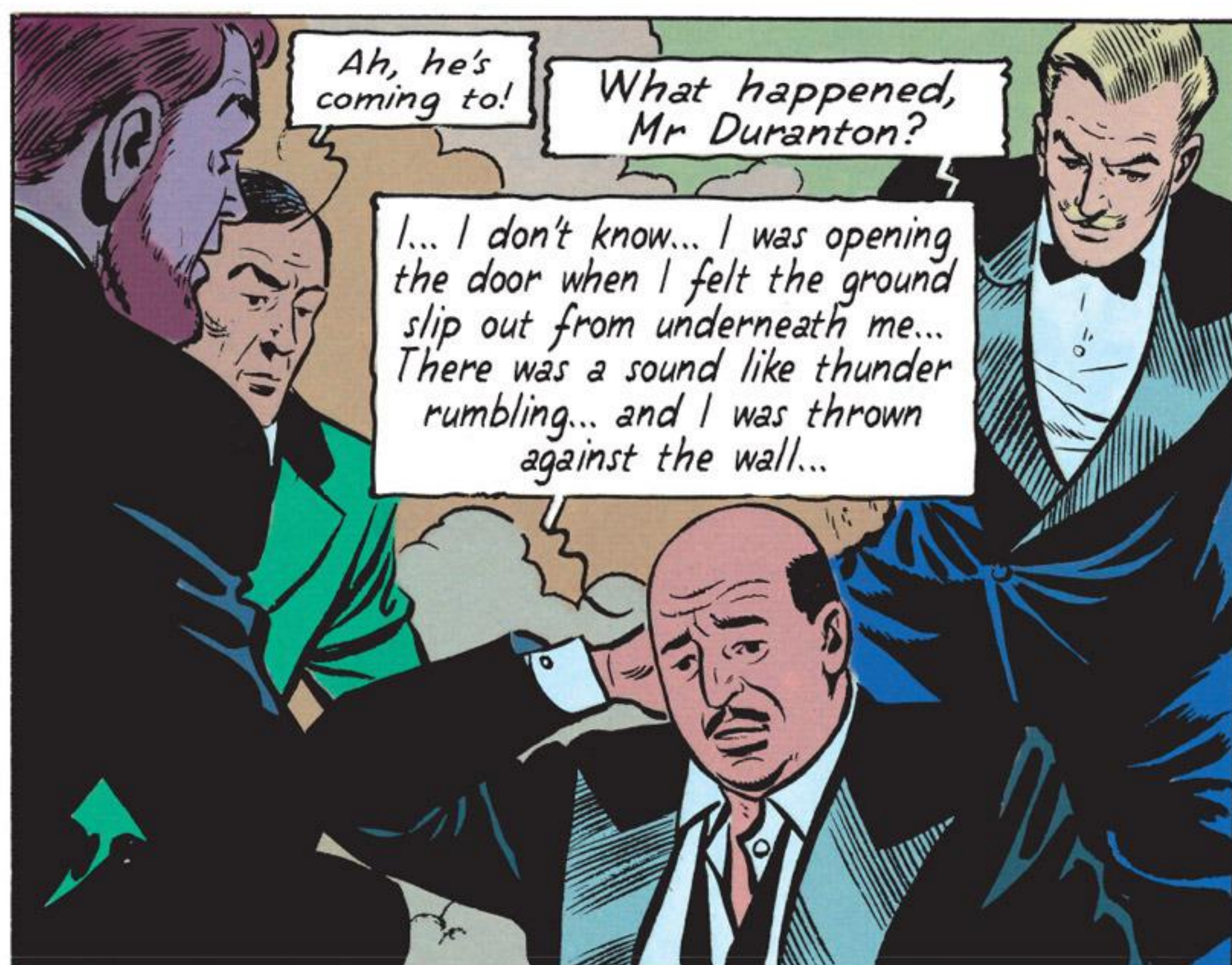
Er... Down... Inside the vault...

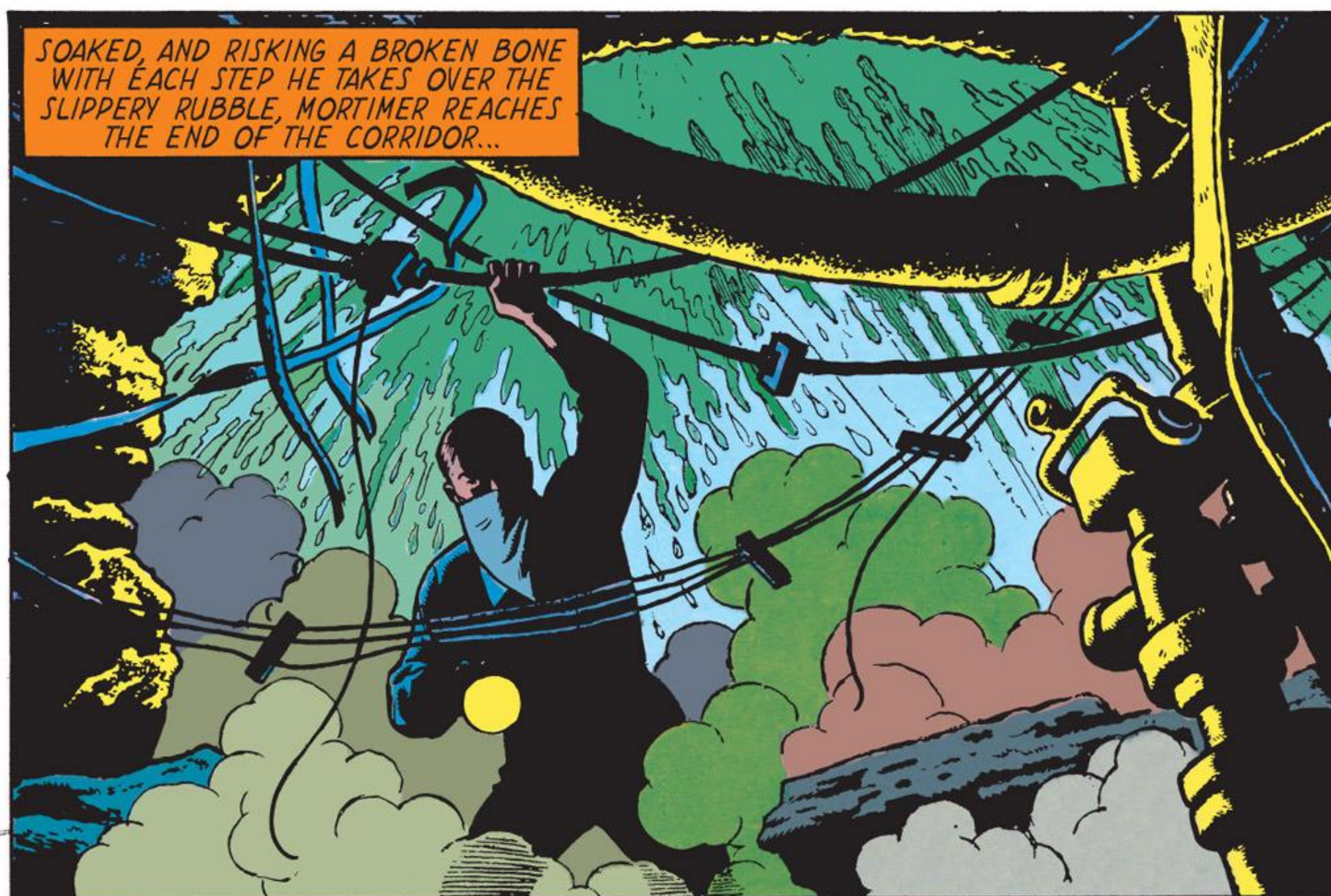
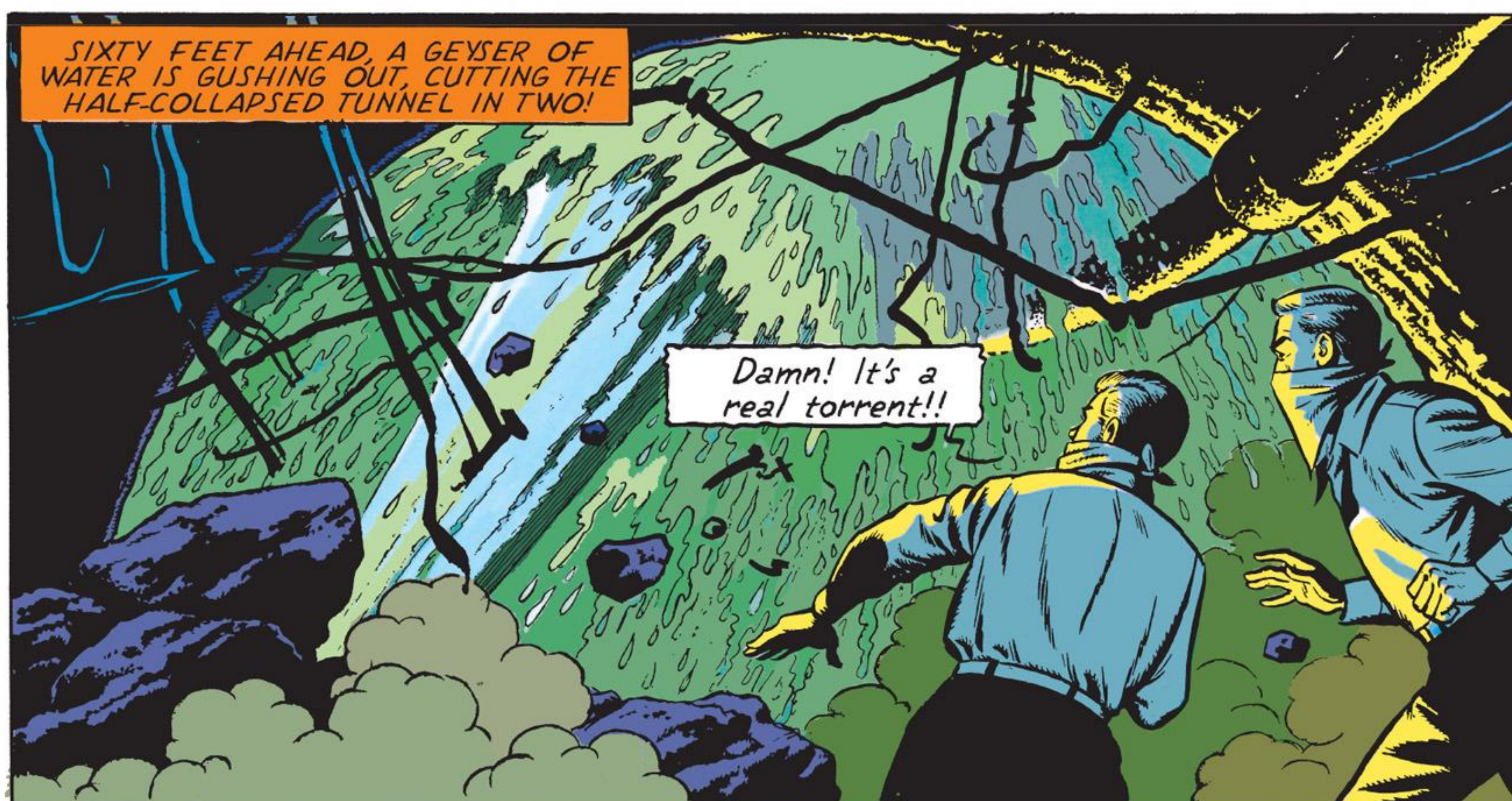
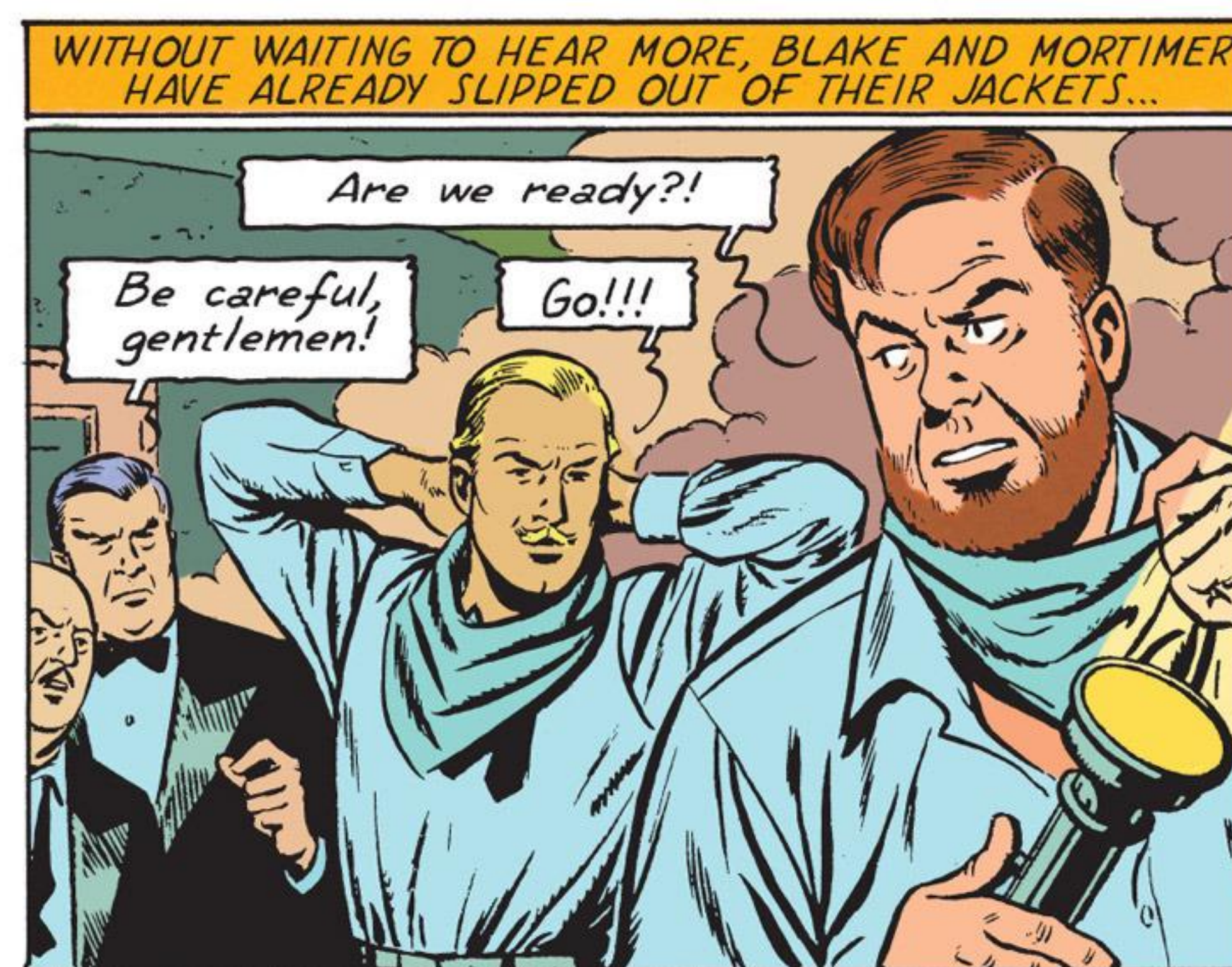


Quickly!!

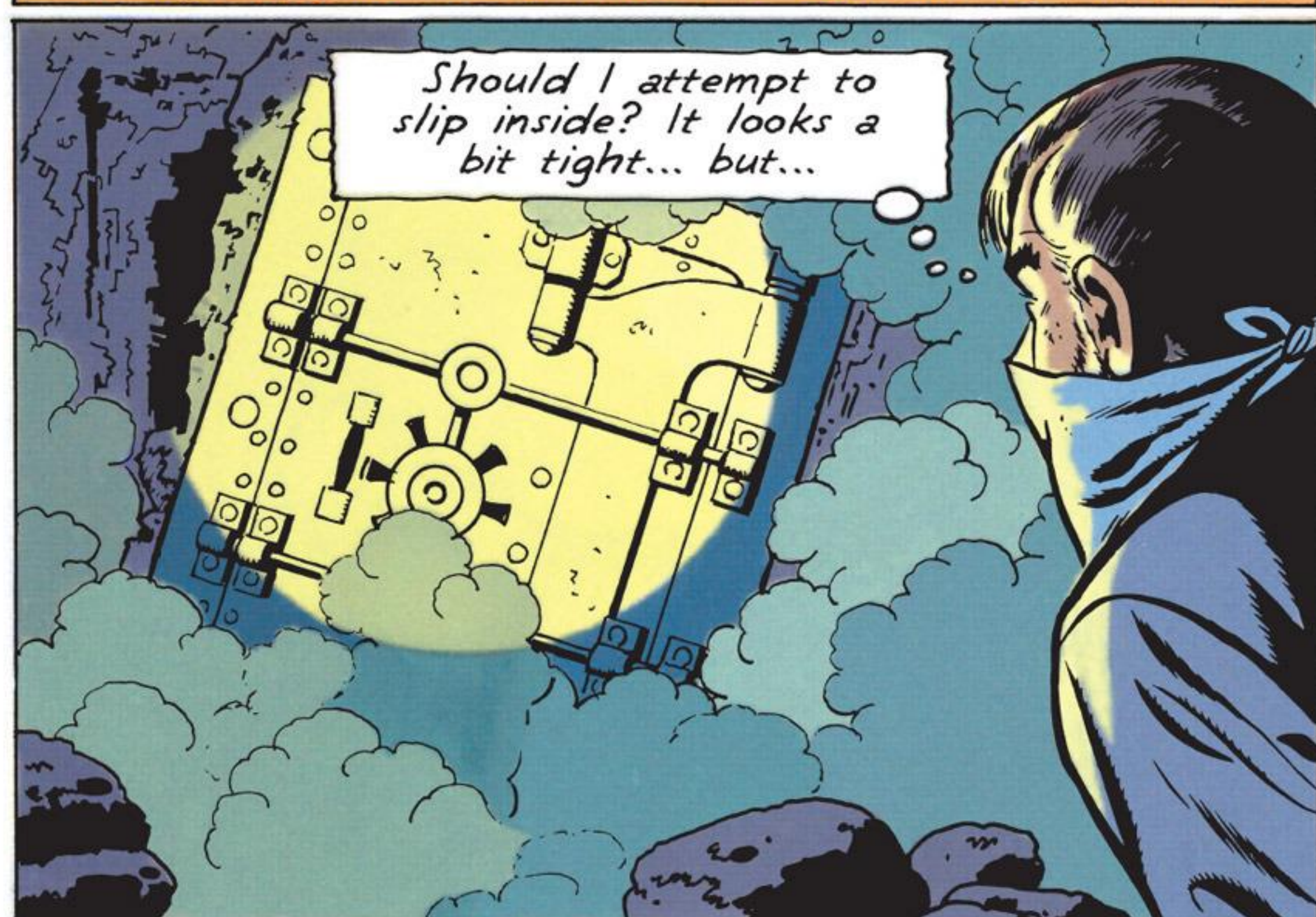
Damn! It's hard to breathe in here!!



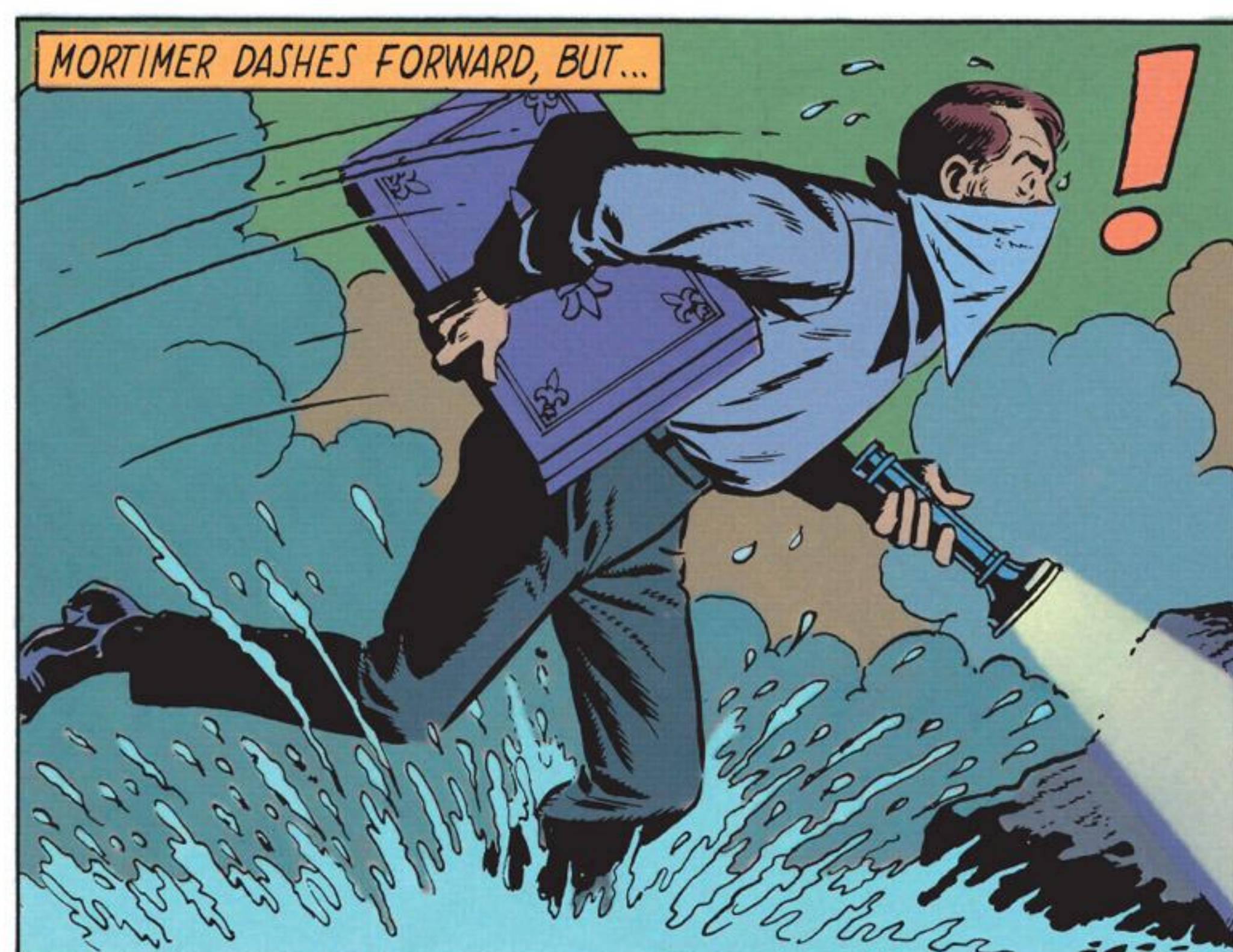
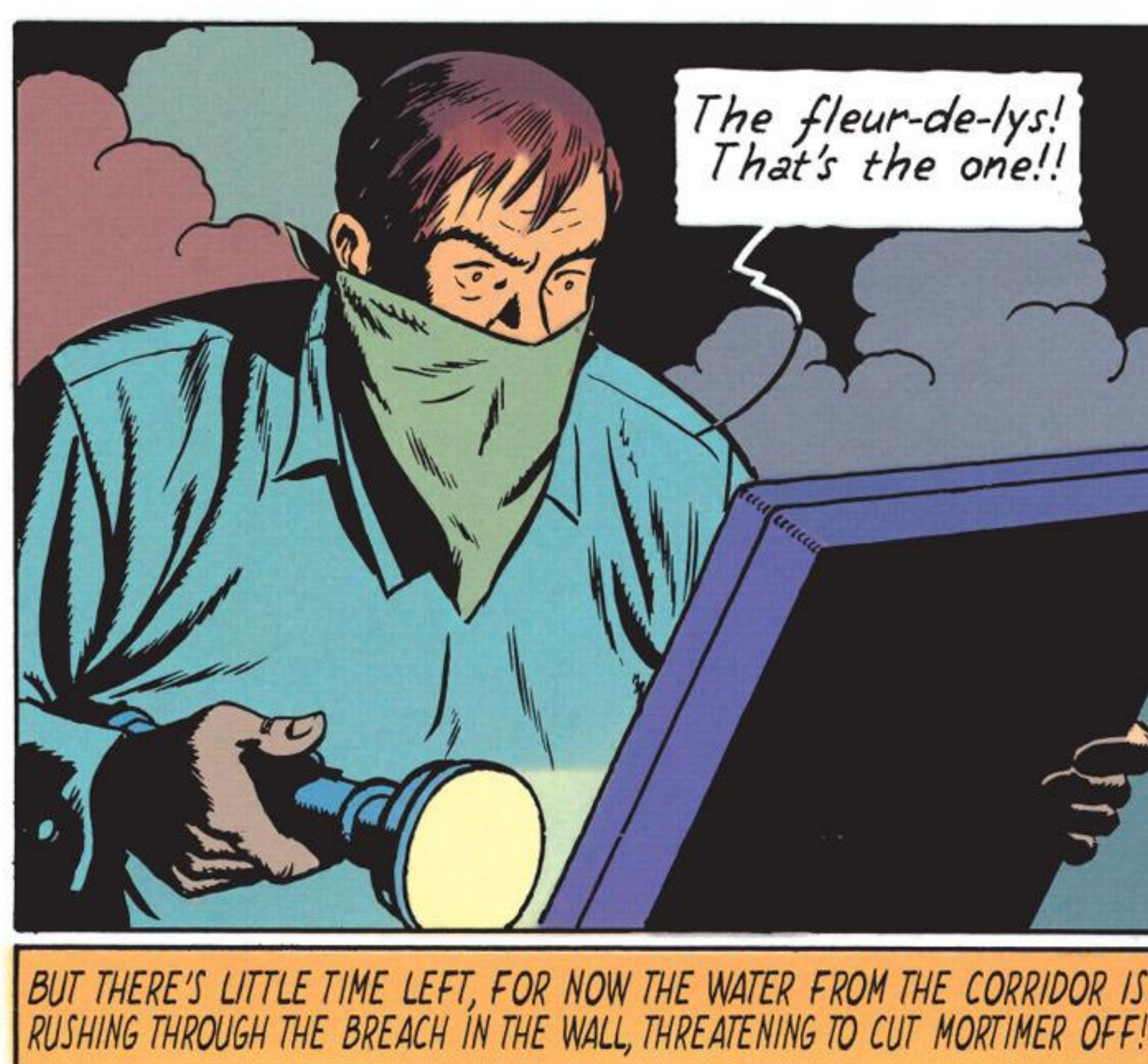




THE DOOR IS STILL LOCKED, BUT IT HAS SLID SIDWAYS, LEAVING A NARROW OPENING BETWEEN THE WALL AND THE STEEL, THROUGH WHICH WATER IS ALREADY RUSHING IN!



A WIDE, DEEP HOLE GAPES IN THE FLOOR OF THE VAULT ROOM, INTO WHICH THE WATER DISAPPEARS...



IN HIS DESPERATE EFFORT TO CATCH THE CASE, WHICH, CAUGHT IN THE WHIRLPOOL, IS SPIRALLING TOWARDS THE HOLE...



... HE DROPS HIS FLASHLIGHT, AND...



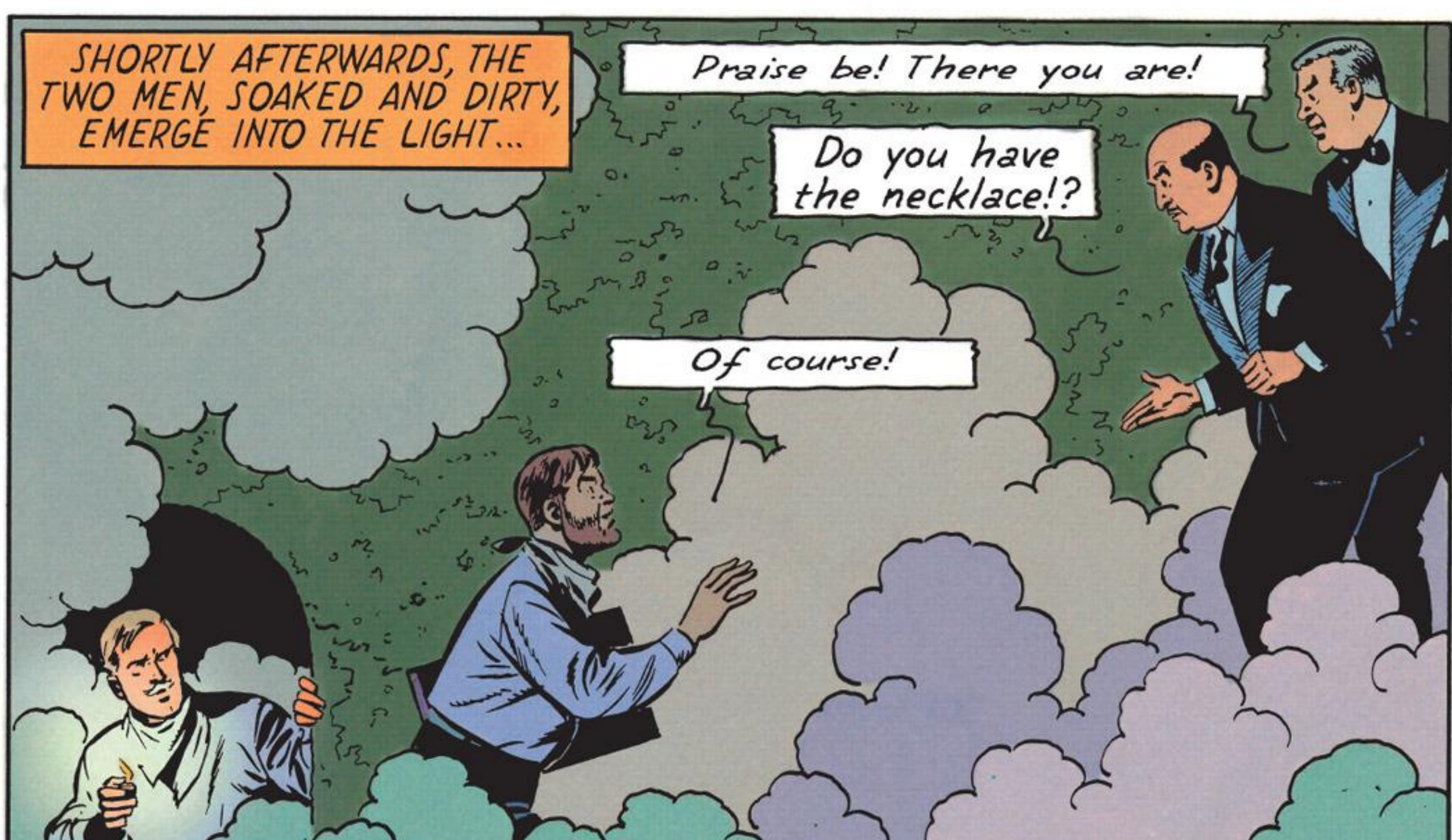
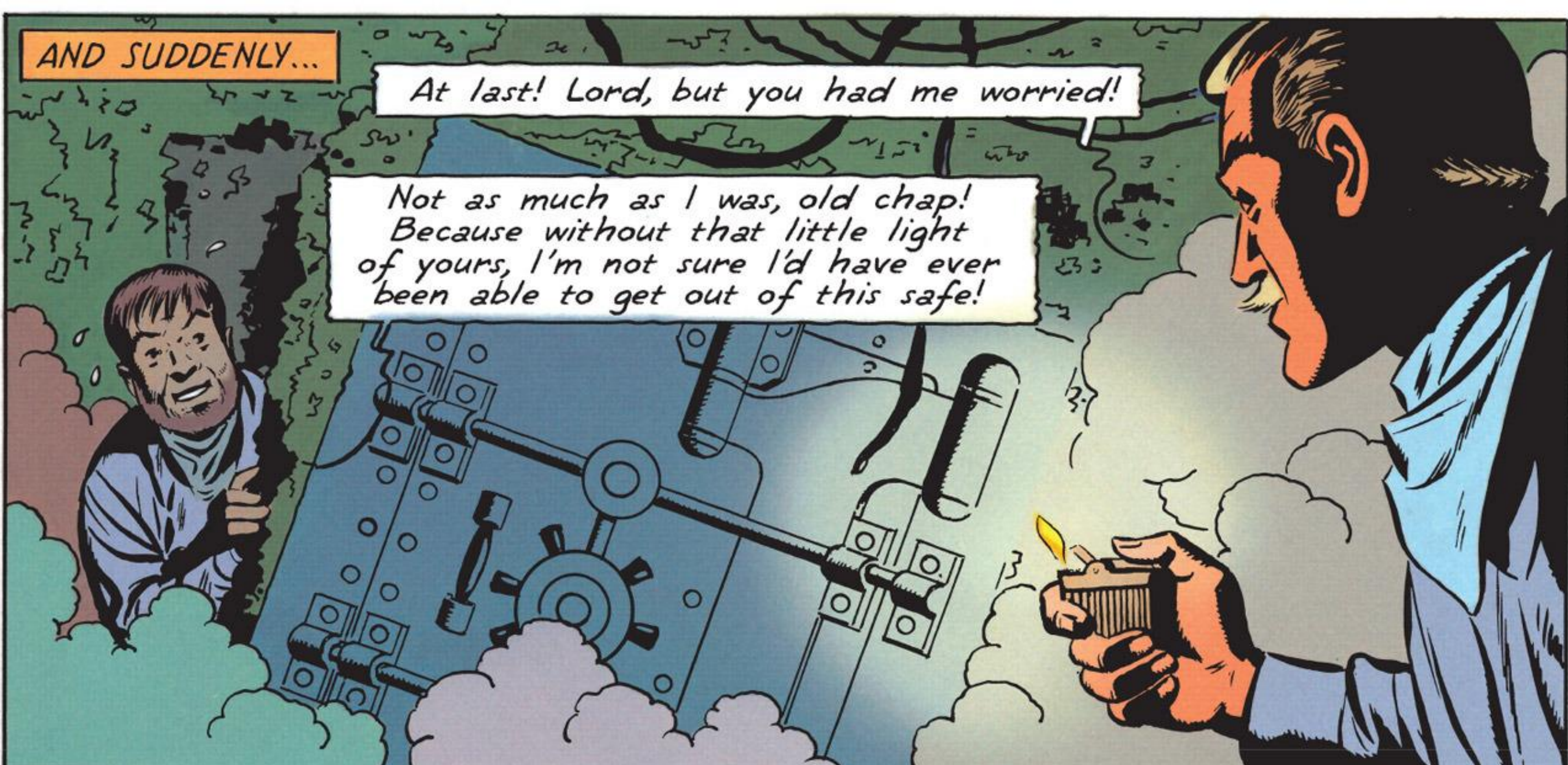
MEANWHILE, OUTSIDE, BLAKE IS WORRIED AT HIS FRIEND'S LENGTHY ABSENCE...

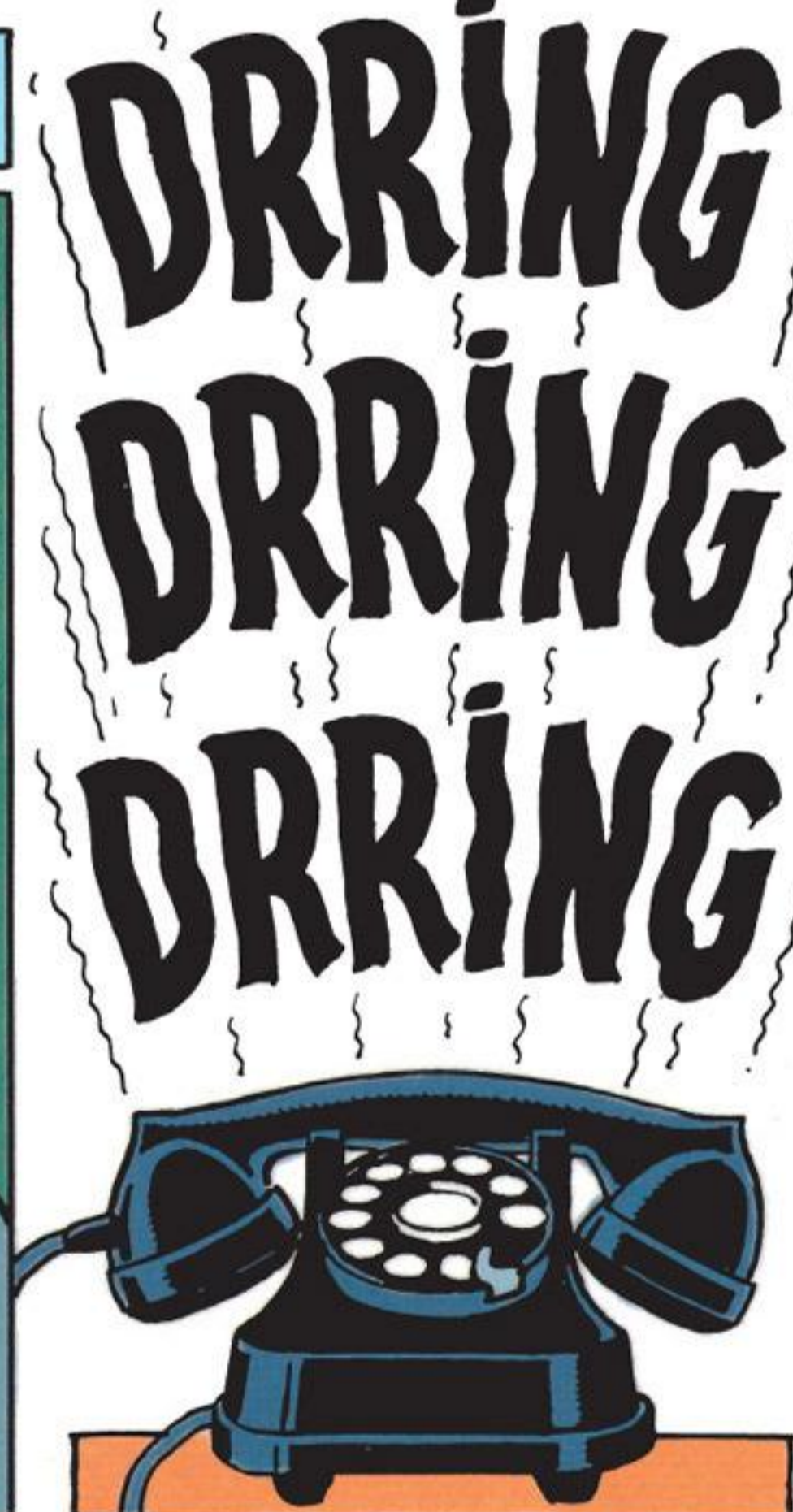
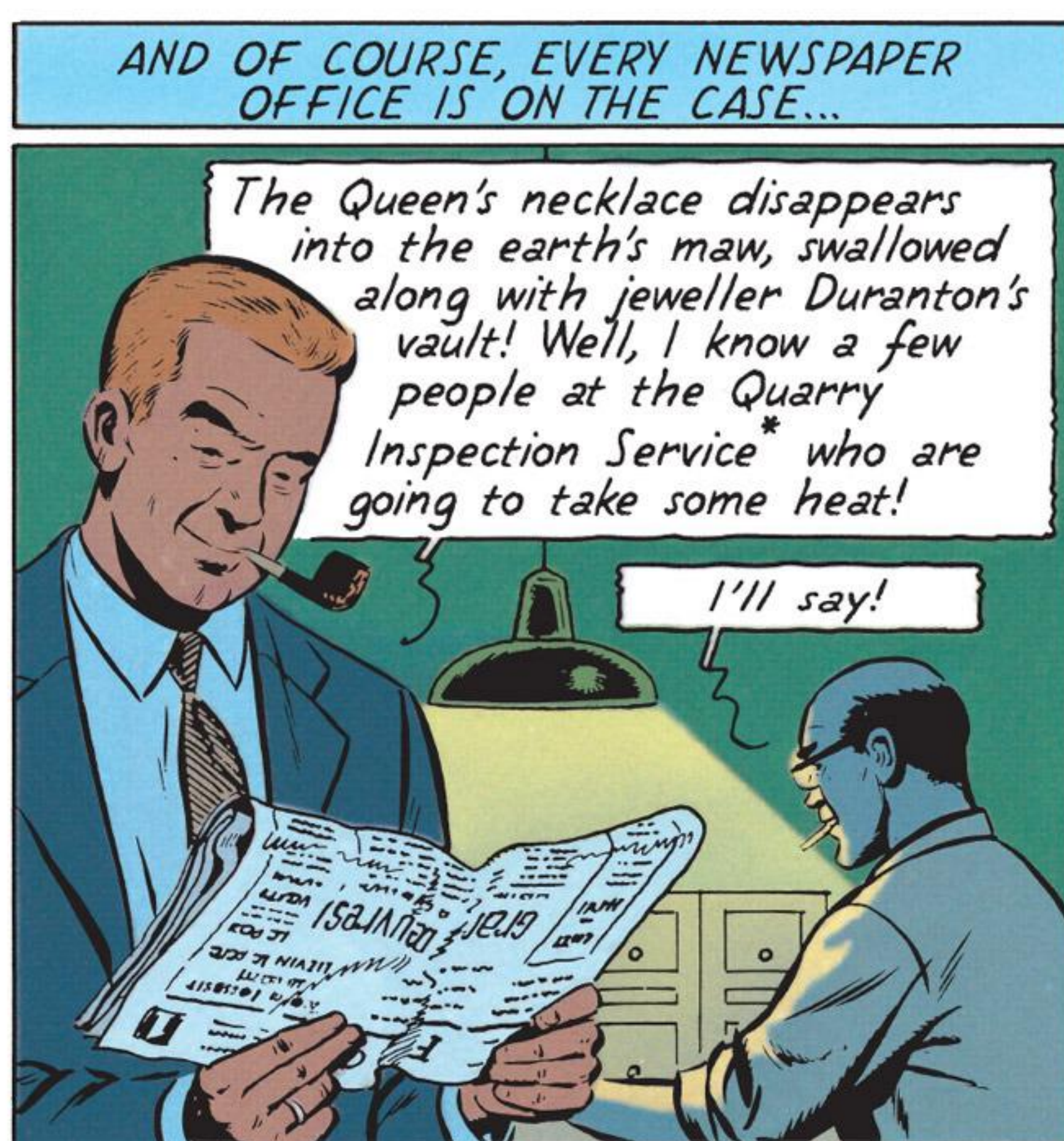
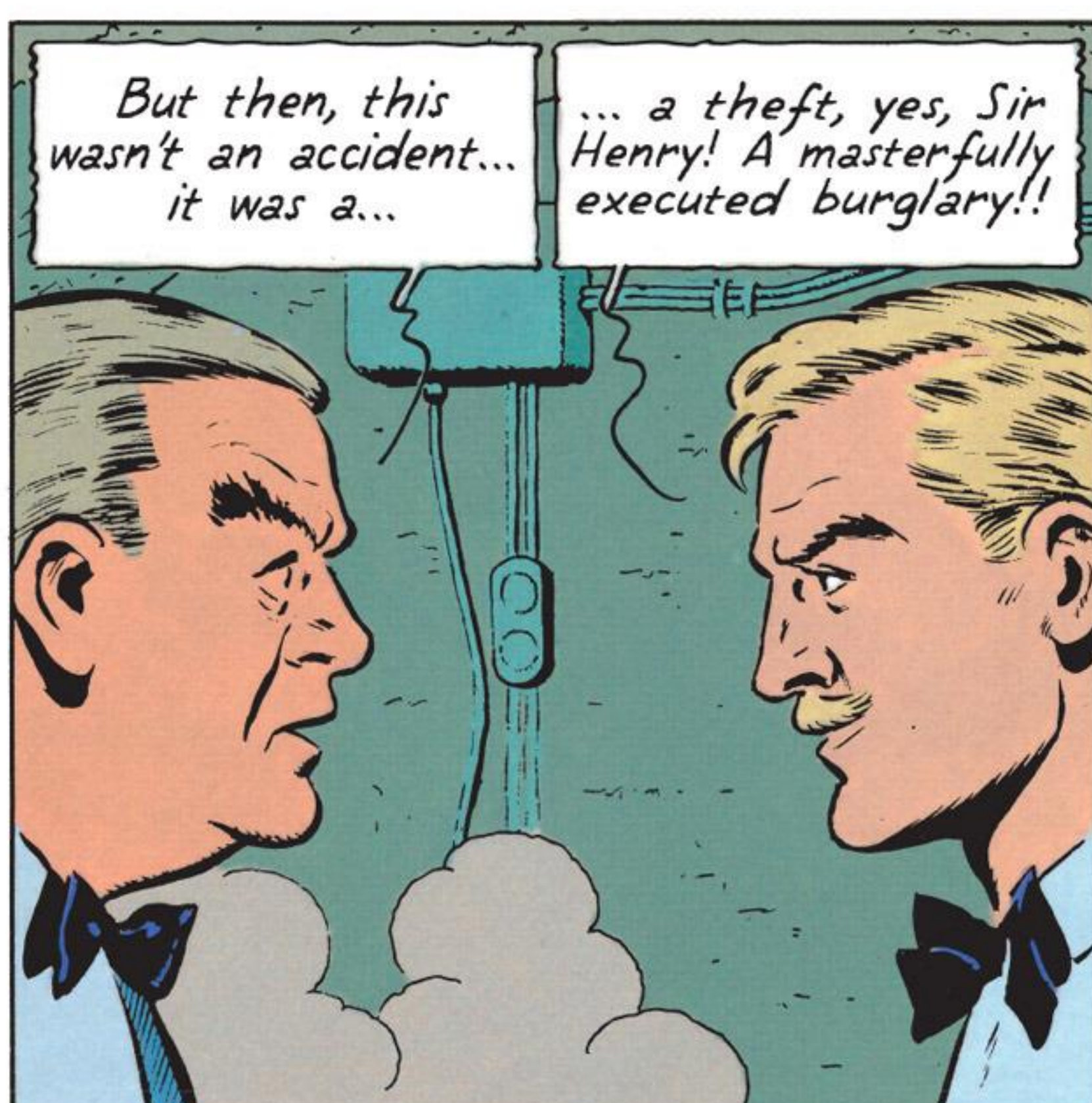
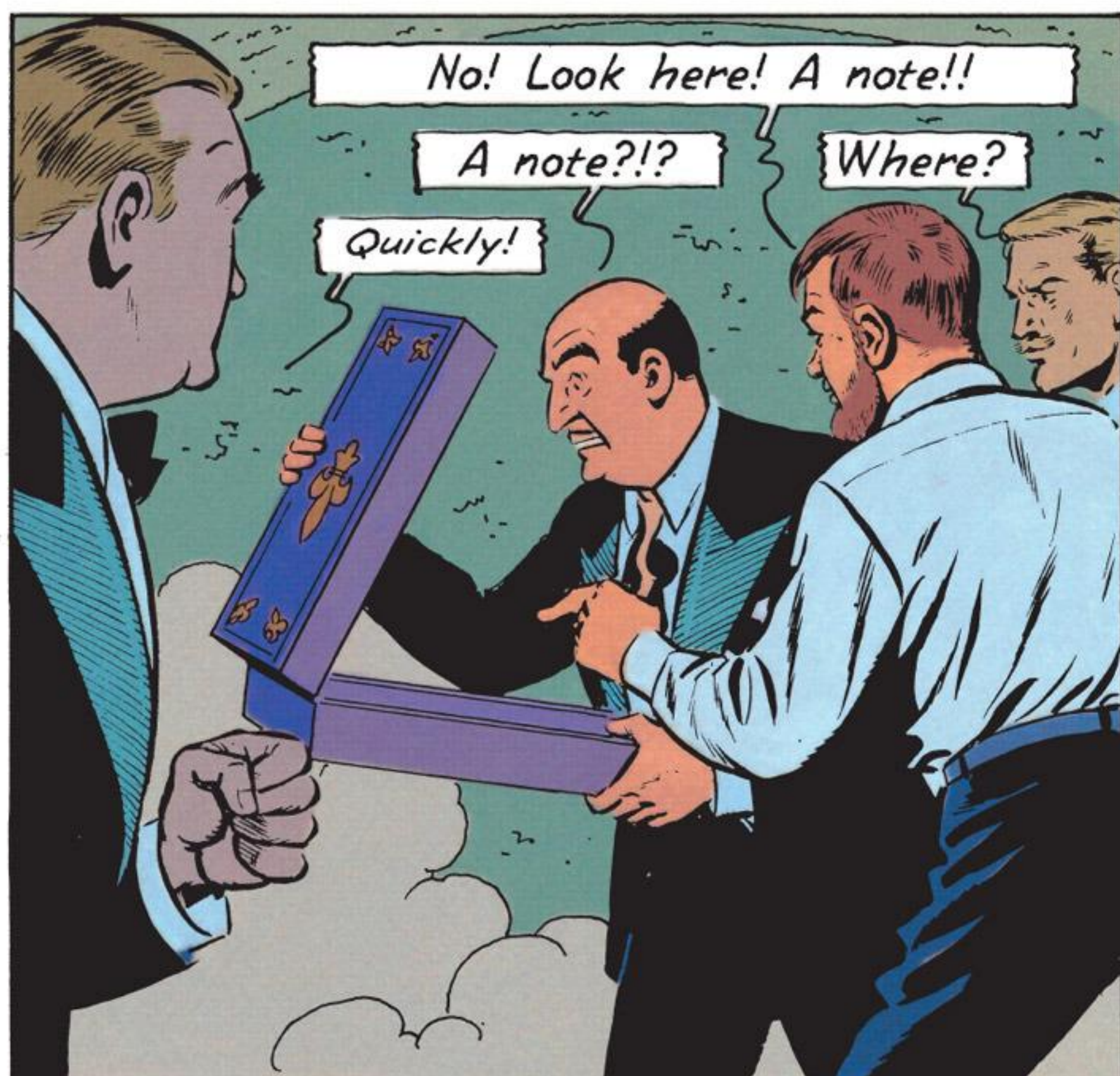


He couldn't possibly hear me with this racket... Ah! To the devil with it! I can't wait any longer!

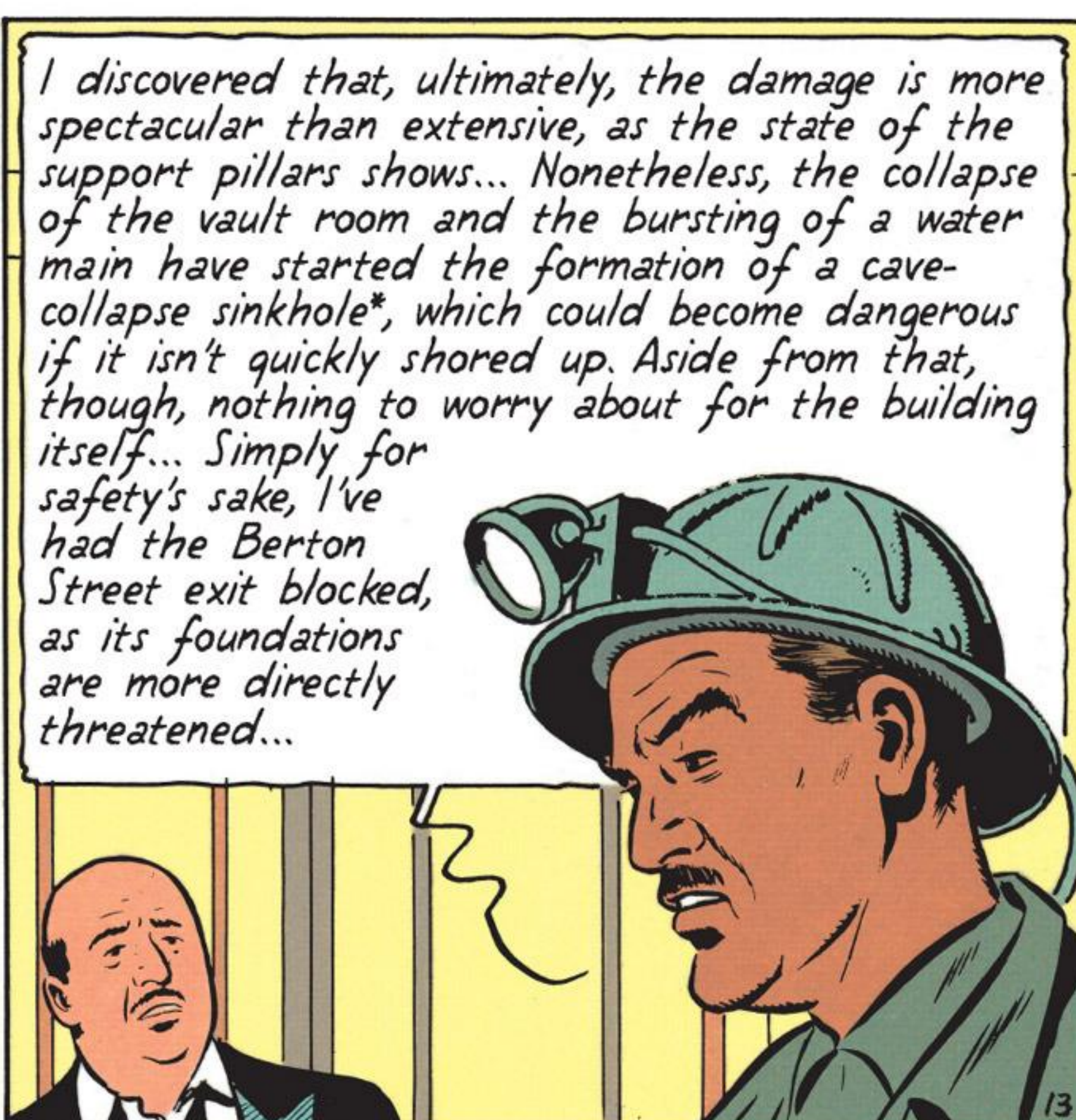
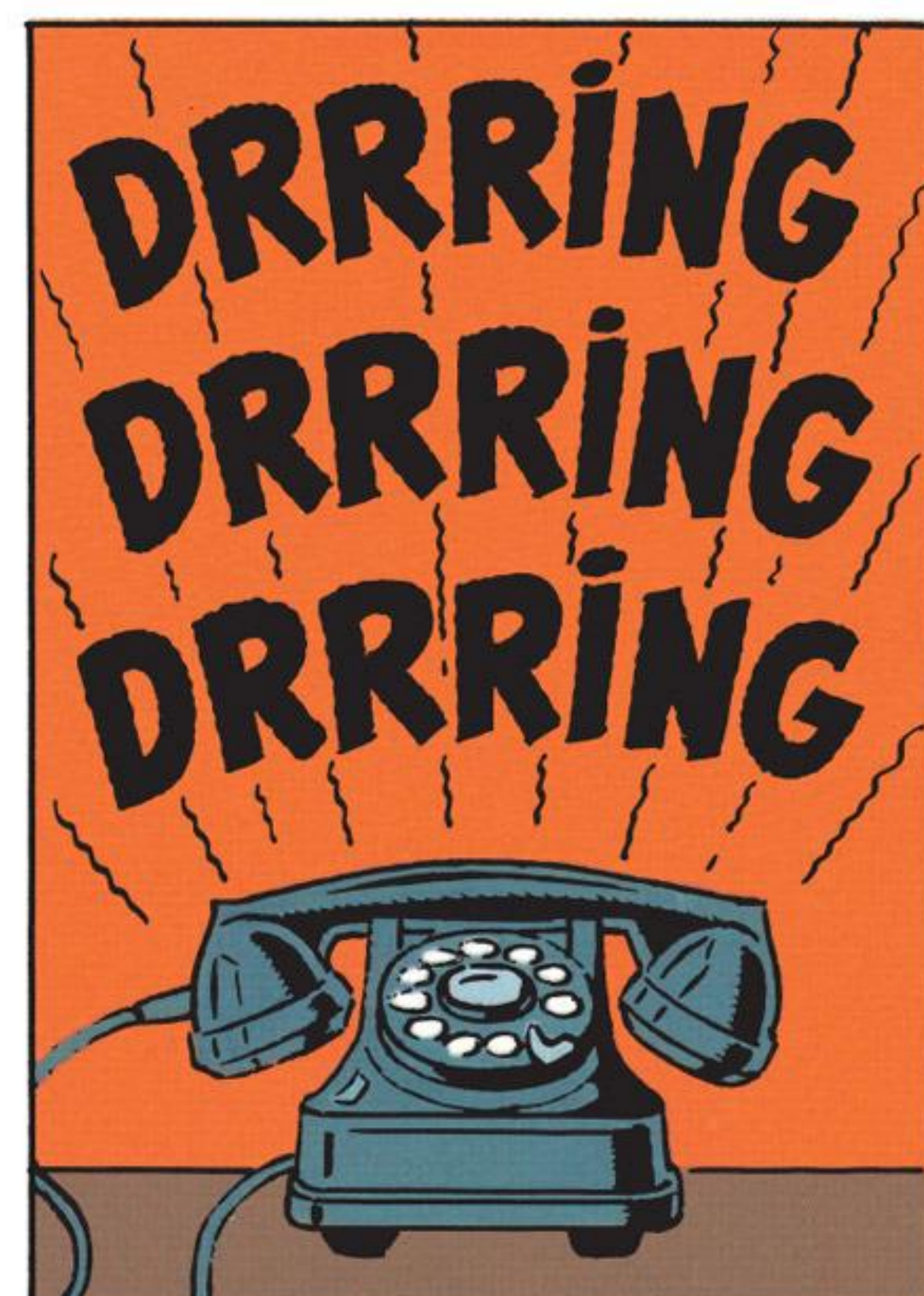
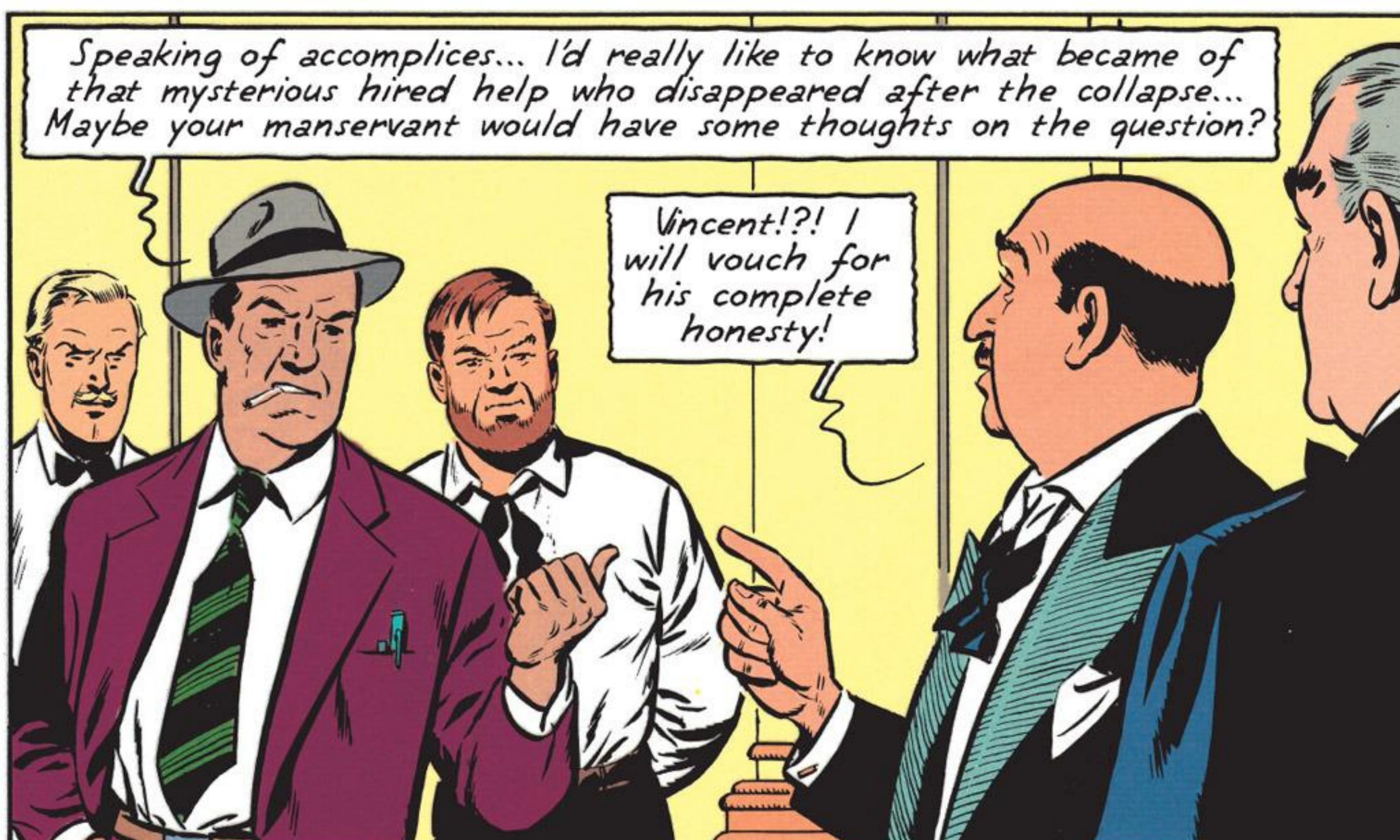
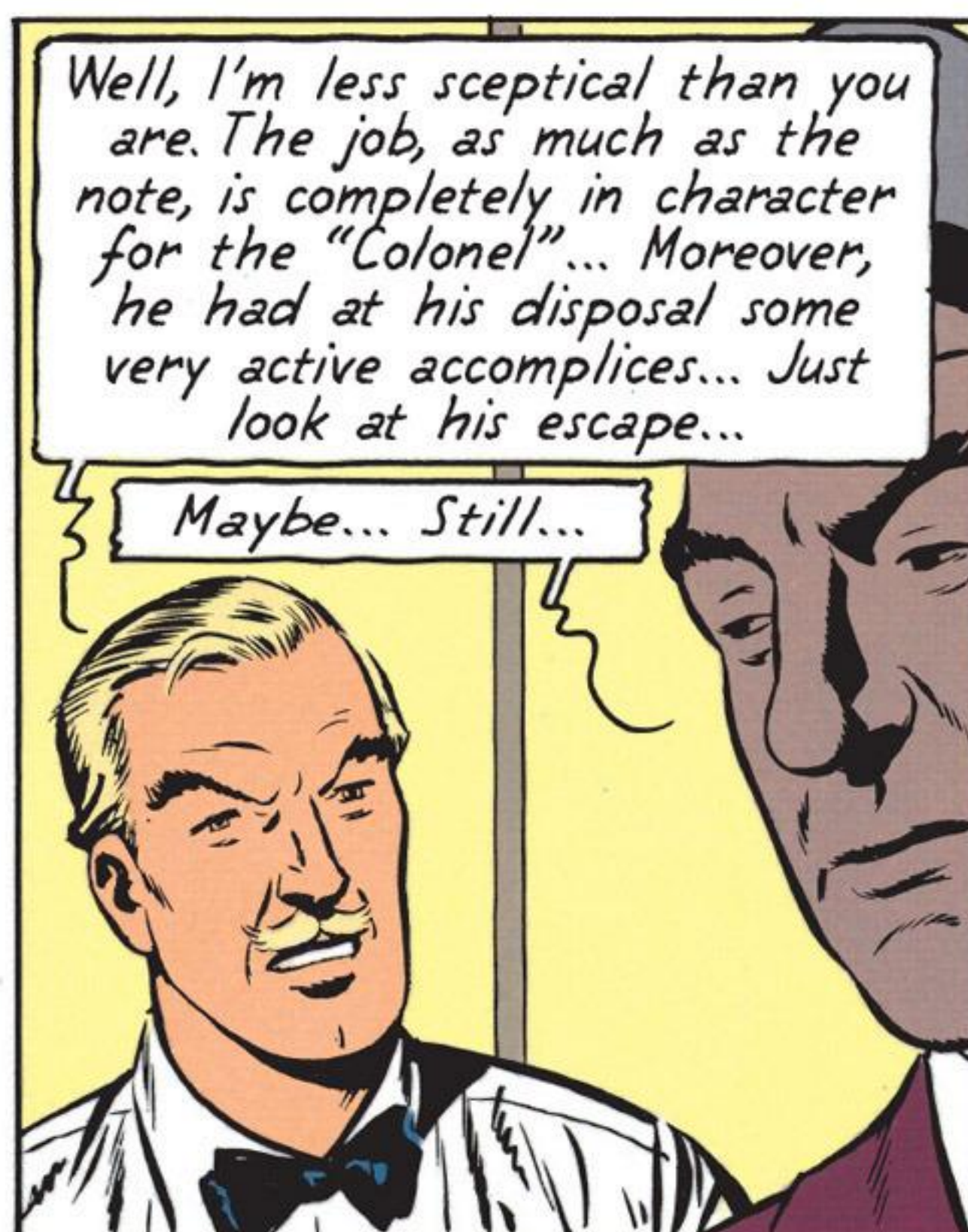
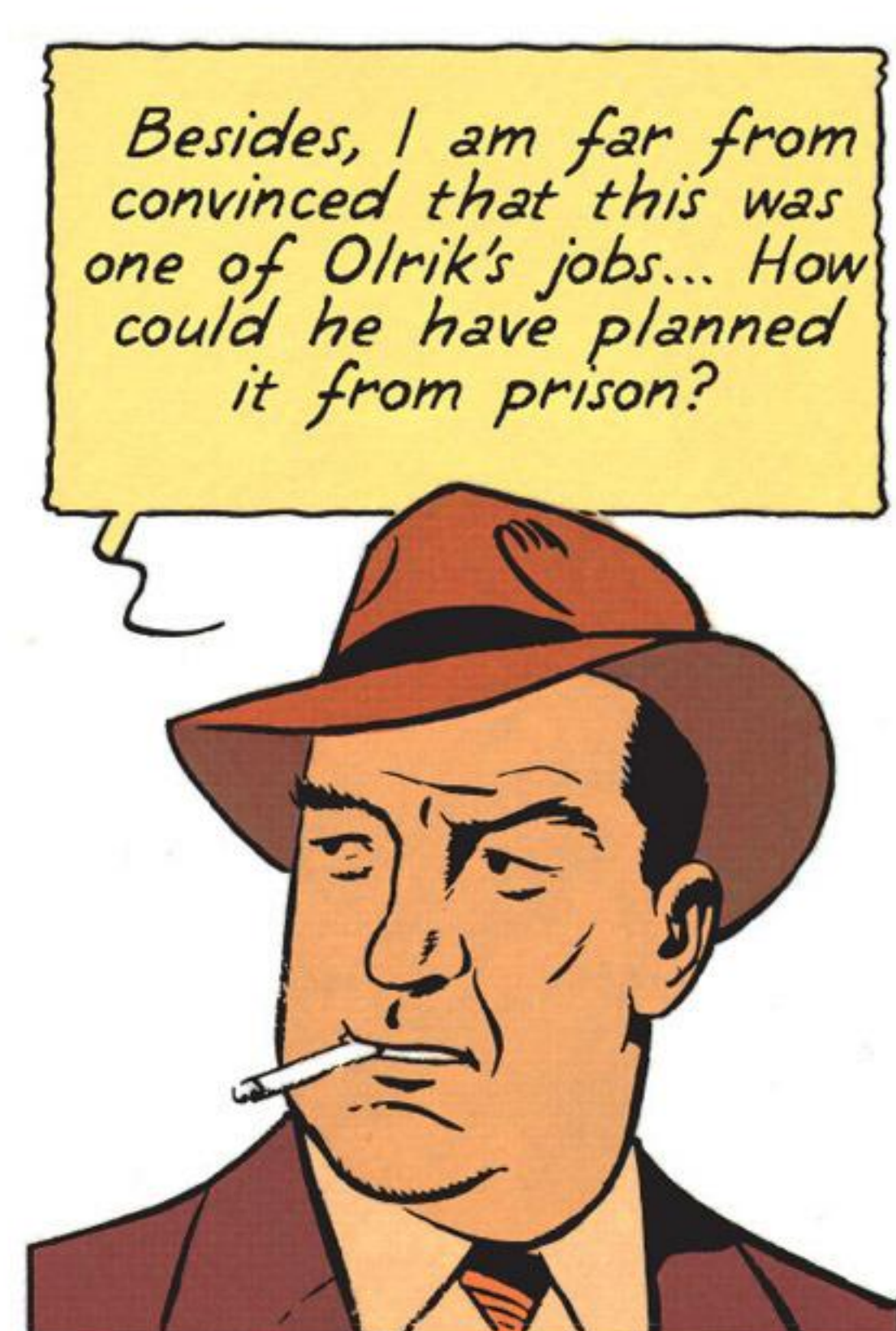
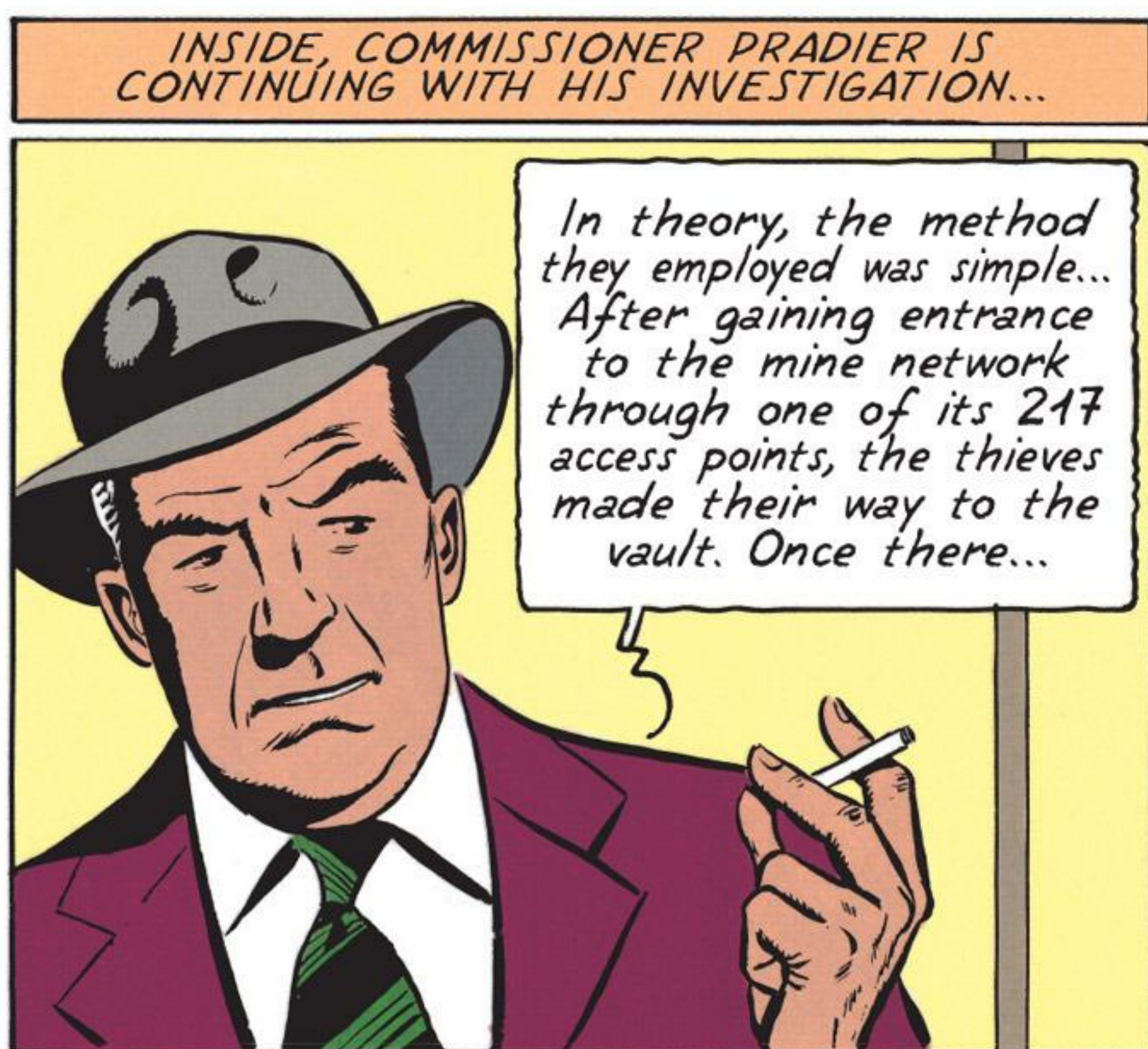
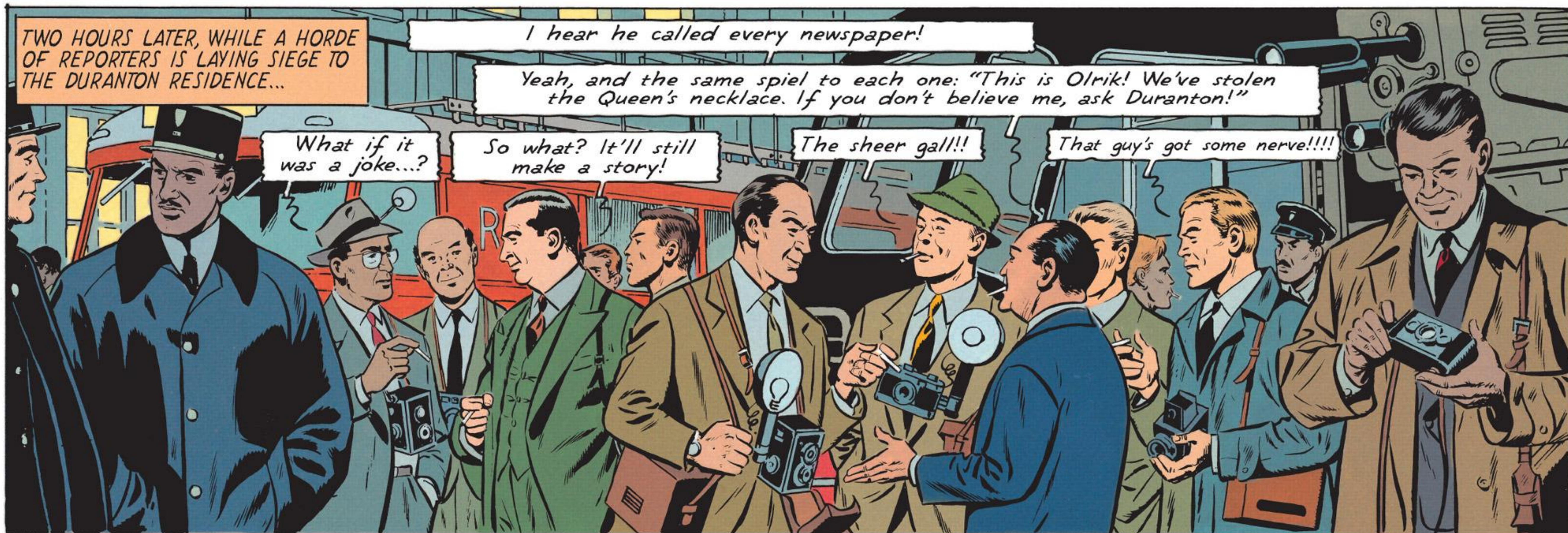


AND, PROTECTING THE FLICKERING FLAME OF HIS LIGHTER AS BEST HE CAN, HE MAKES HIS WAY UNDER THE JET OF WATER THAT IS SLOWLY FLOODING THE CORRIDOR...

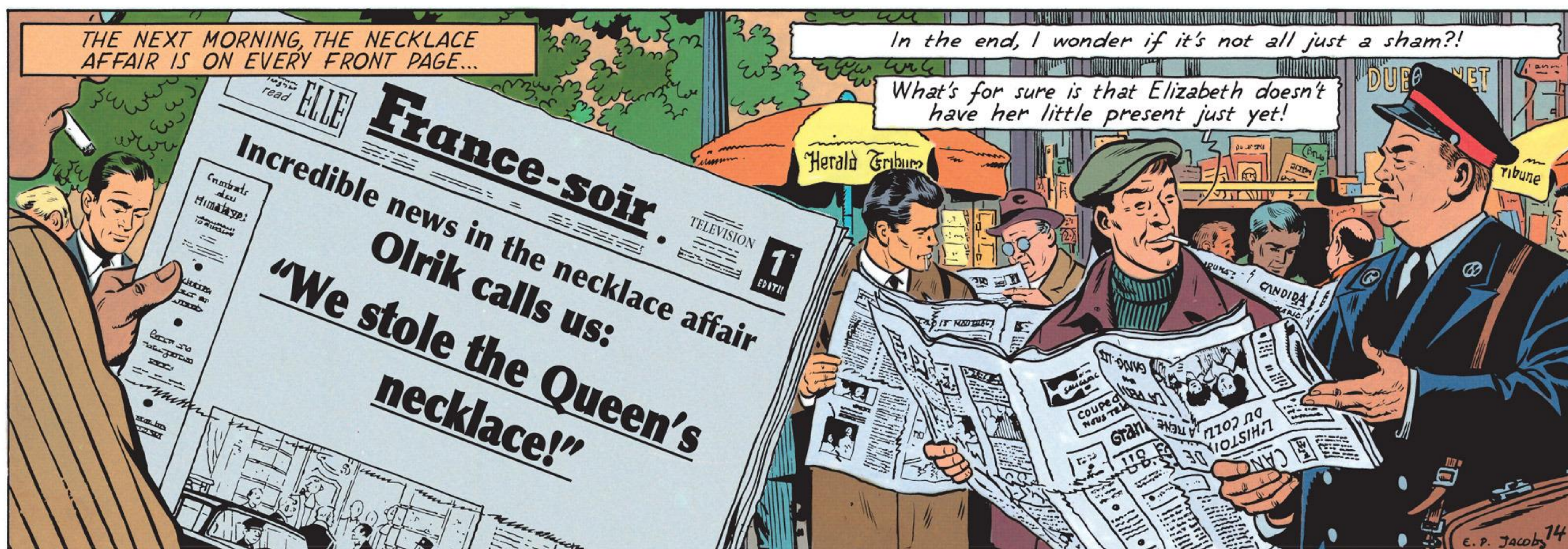
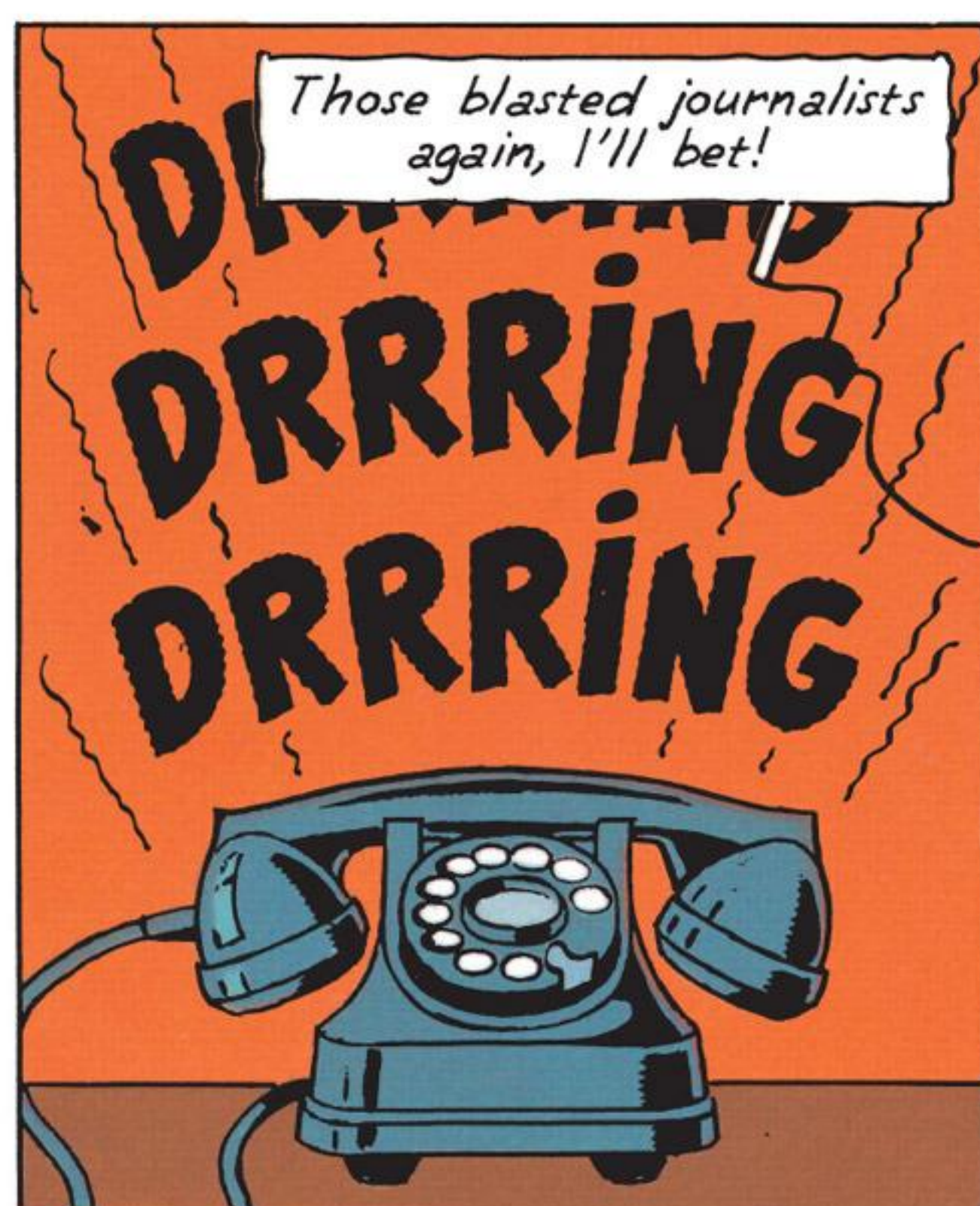
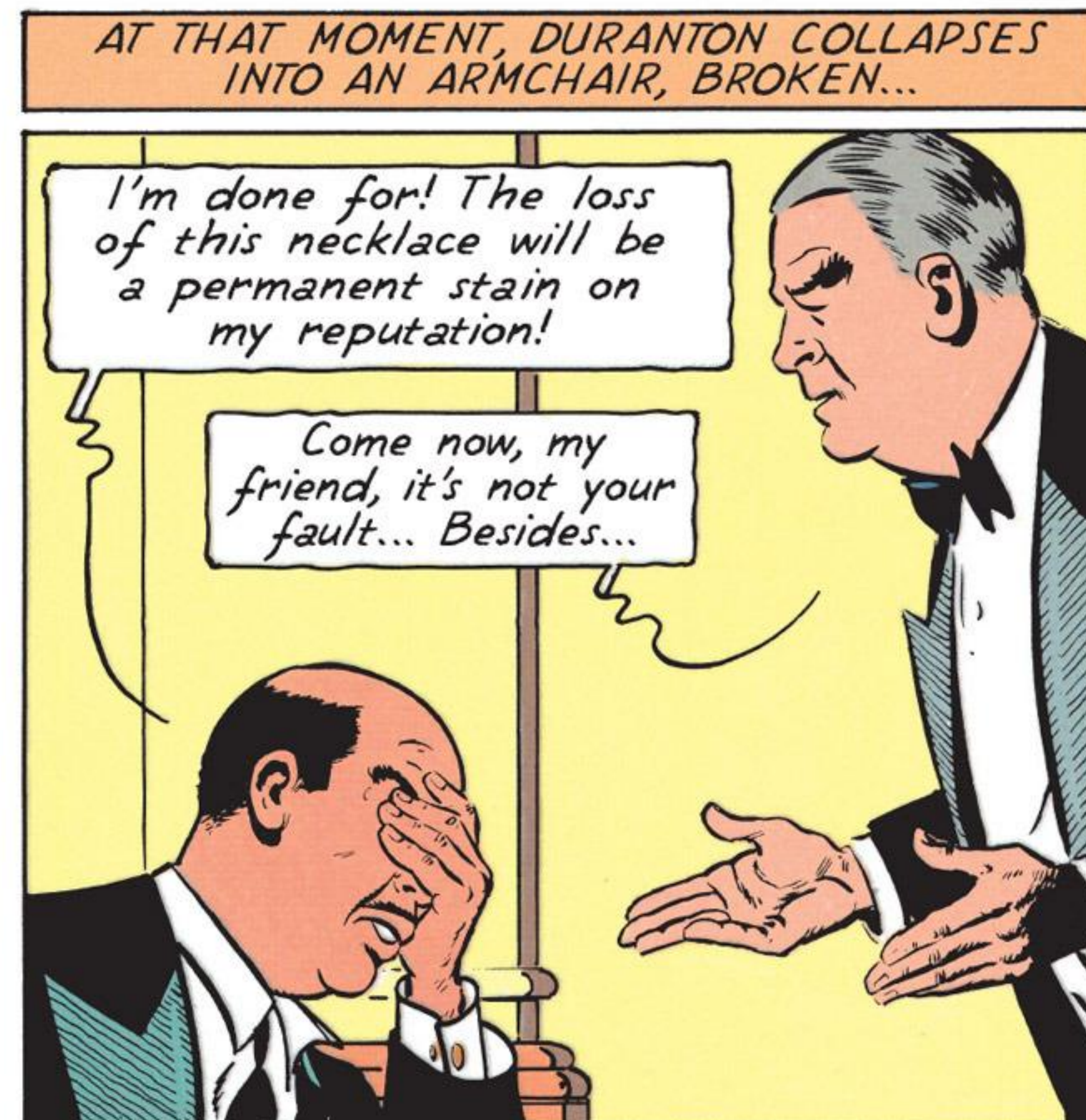




* INSPECTION DES CARRIÈRES: ORGANISATION CHARGED WITH STUDYING, MAPPING, AND CONSOLIDATING THE UNDERSIDE OF PARIS



*CAVE-COLLAPSE SINKHOLE: BELL-SHAPED CAVITY LEFT BY THE COLLAPSE OF A CAVE ROOF



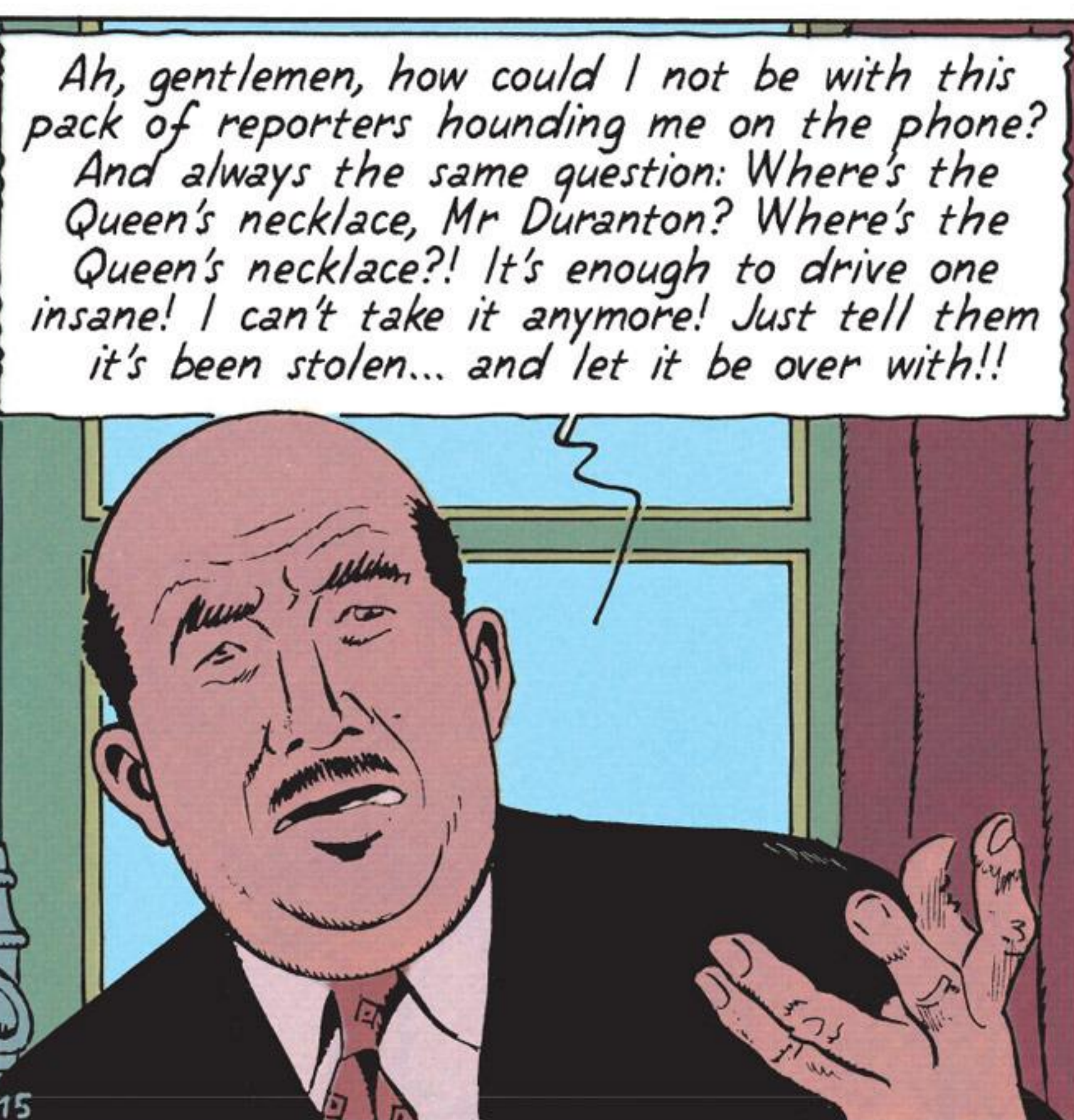
ON THEIR PART, DETERMINED TO RISE TO OLRİK'S CHALLENGE, BLAKE AND MORTIMER HAVE STARTED THEIR CAMPAIGN...

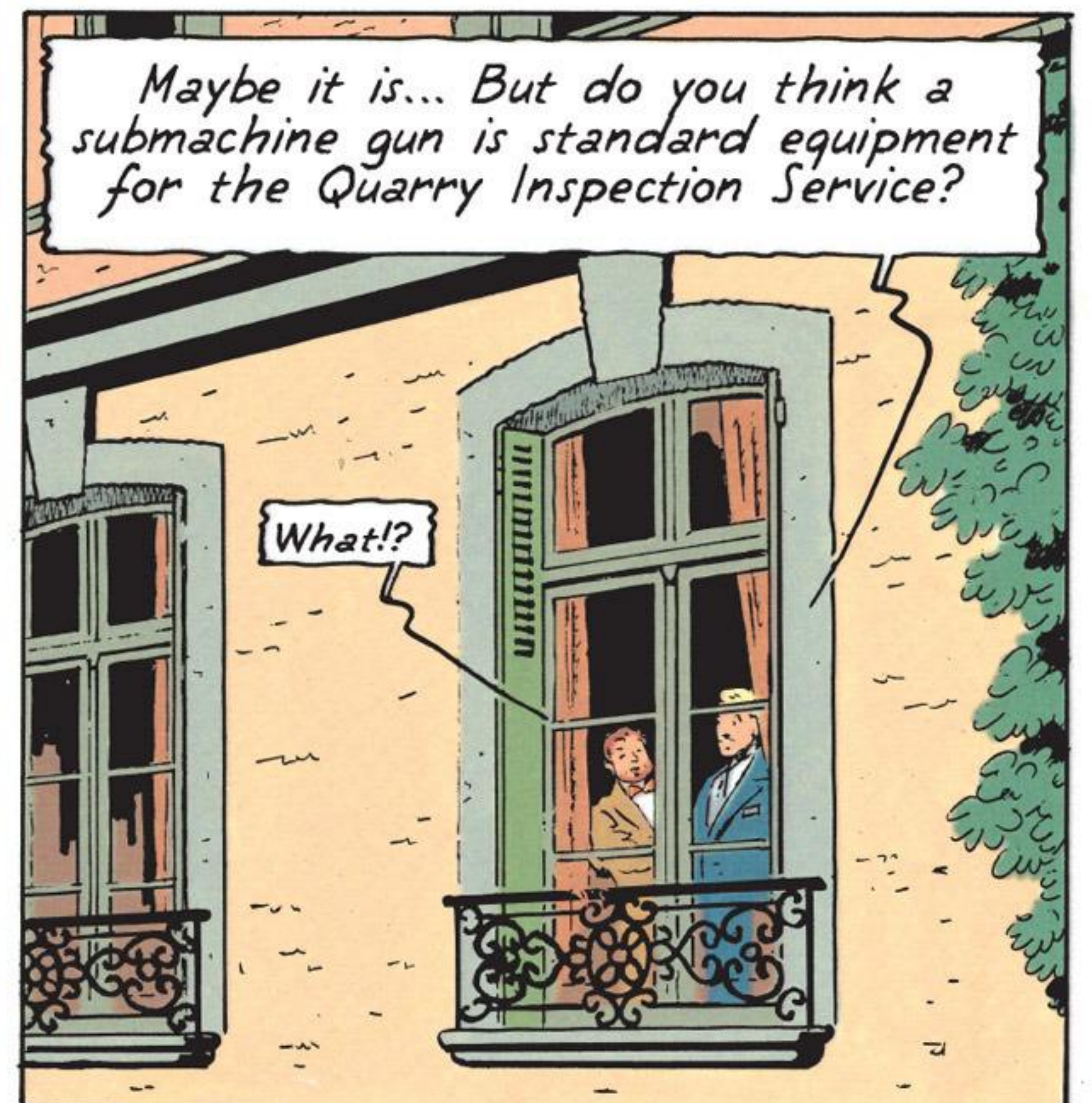
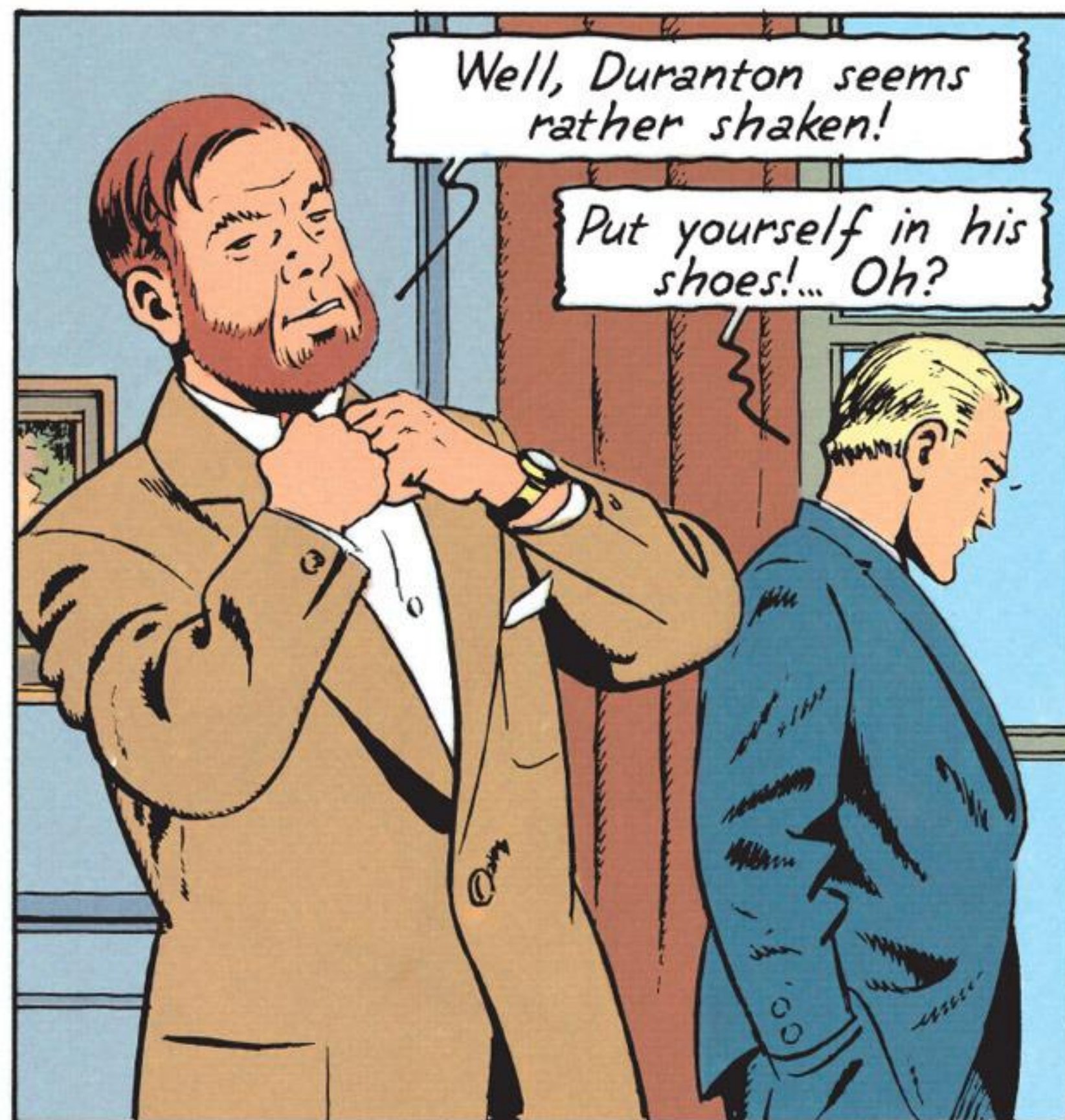
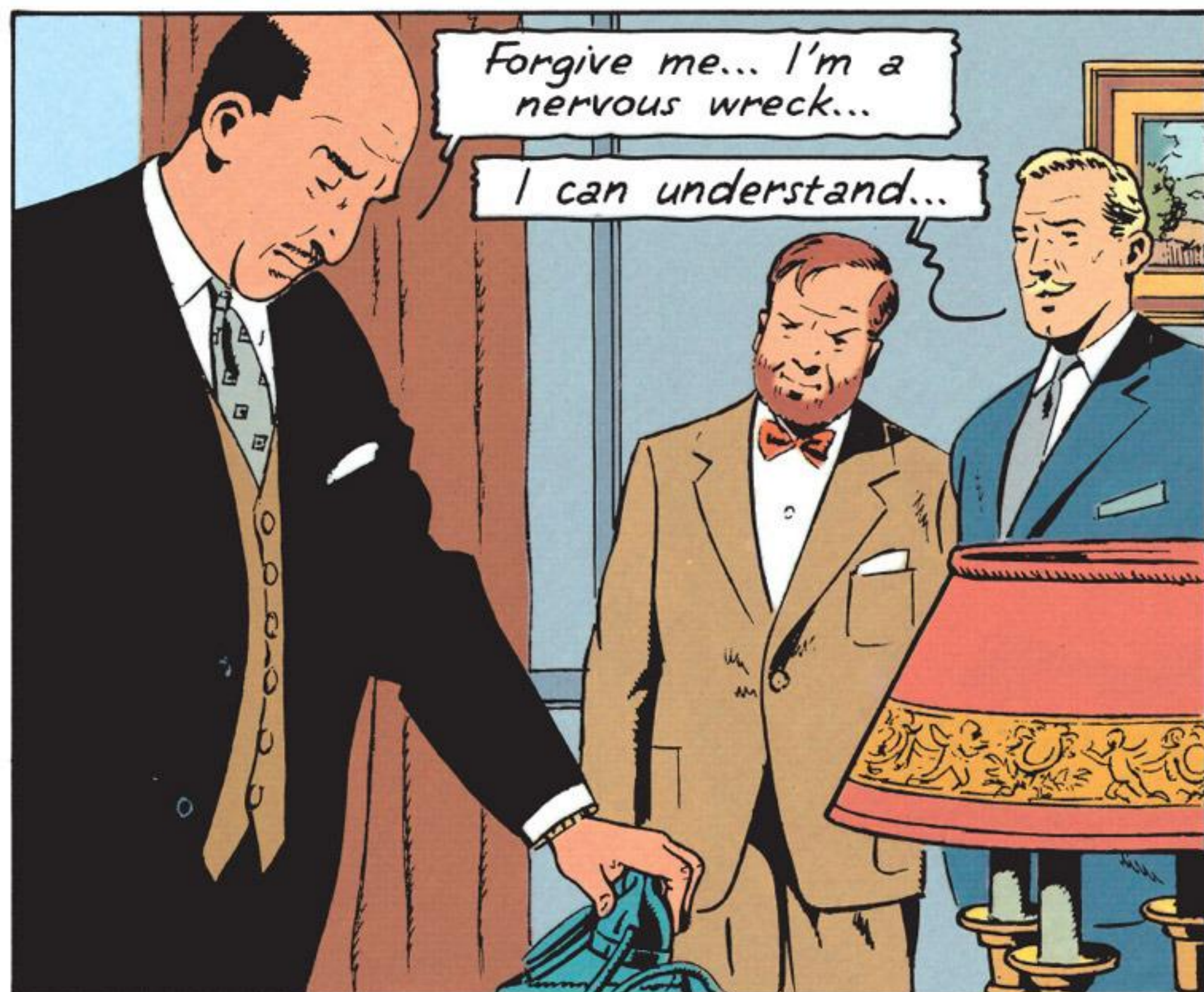
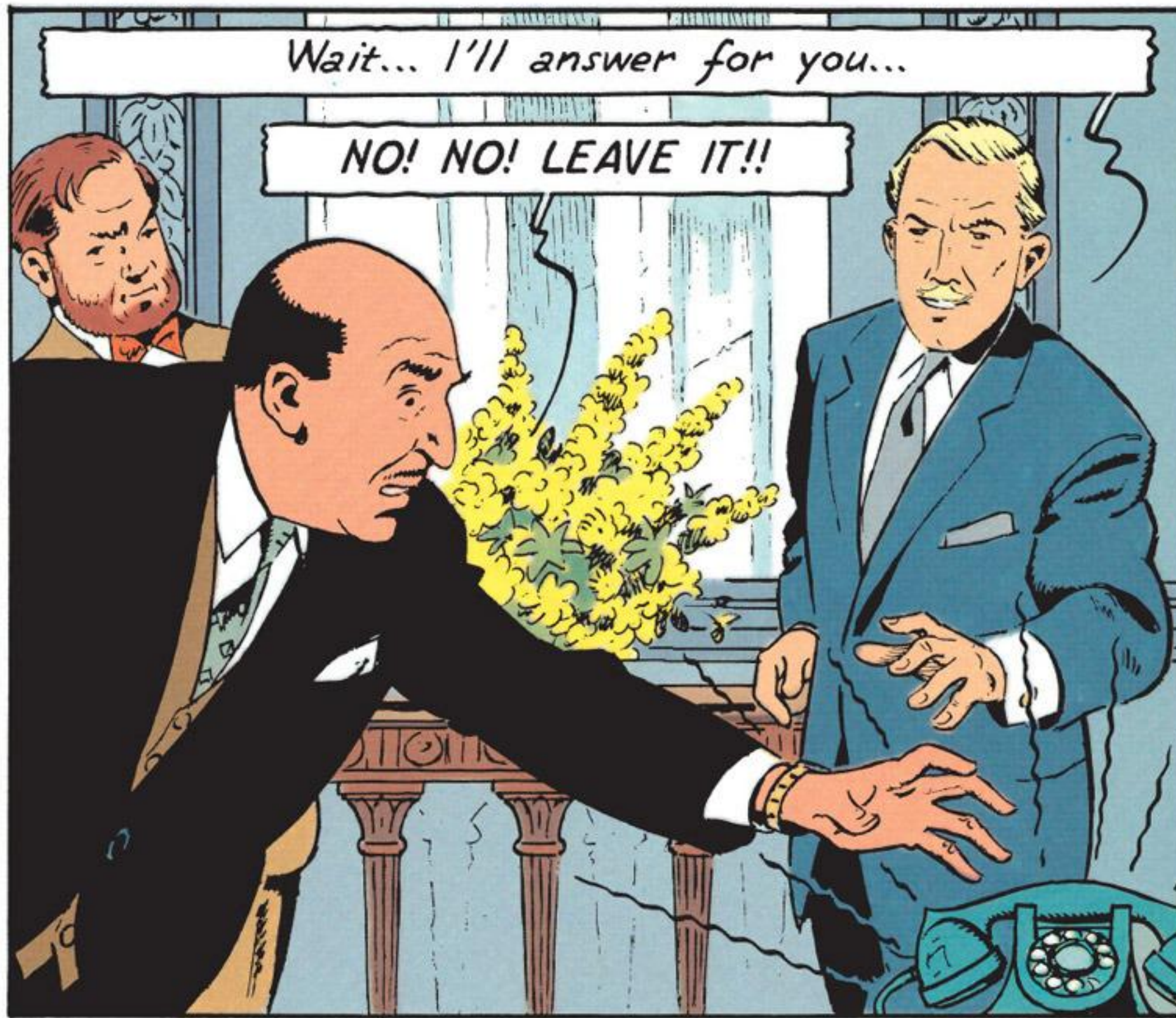
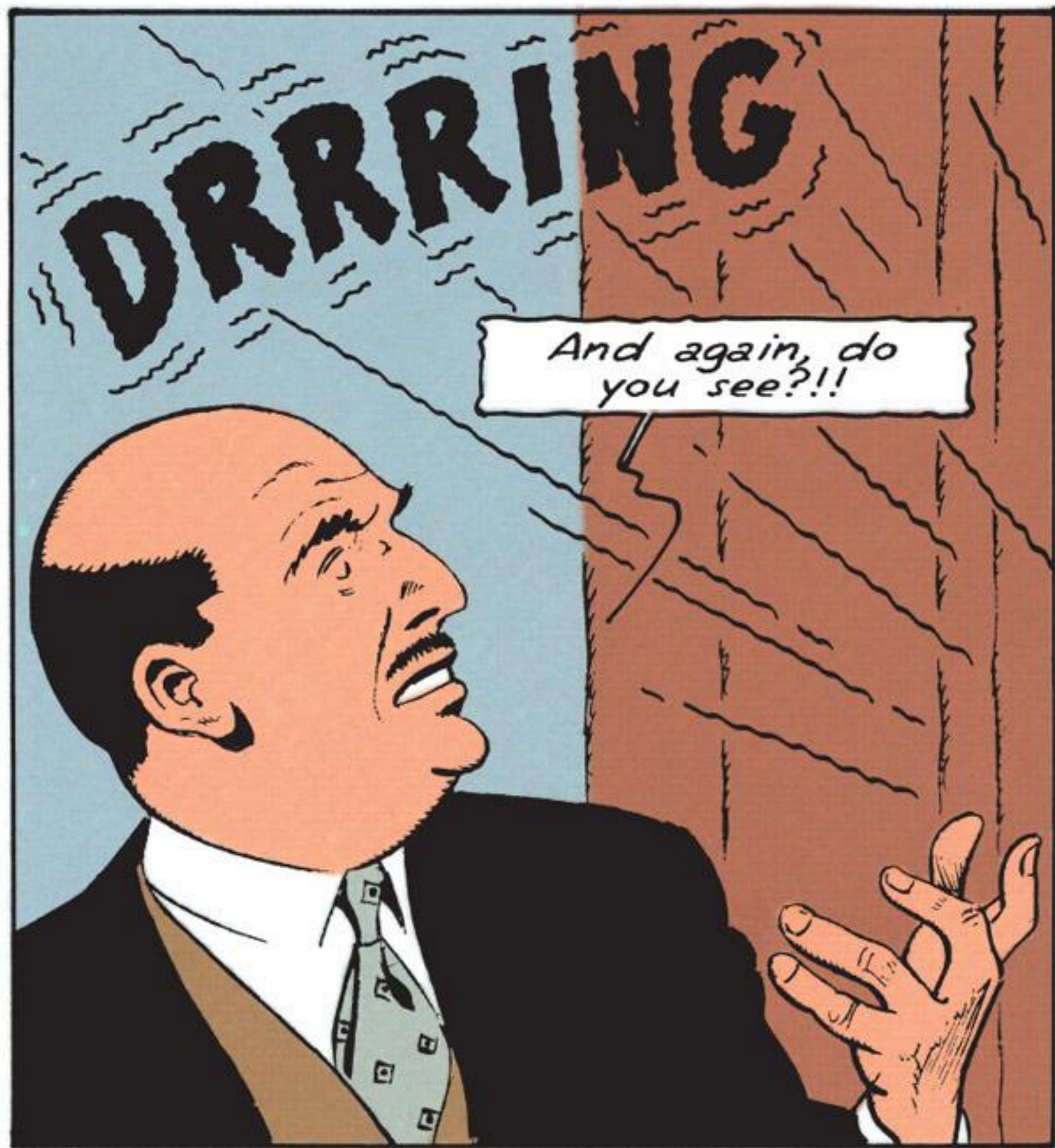


THE TWO MEN HAVE REACHED THE DURANTON RESIDENCE, WHERE A CONSTABLE IS GUARDING THE DOOR.



FORTUNATELY, COMMISSIONER PRADIER APPEARS AT THE ENTRANCE...

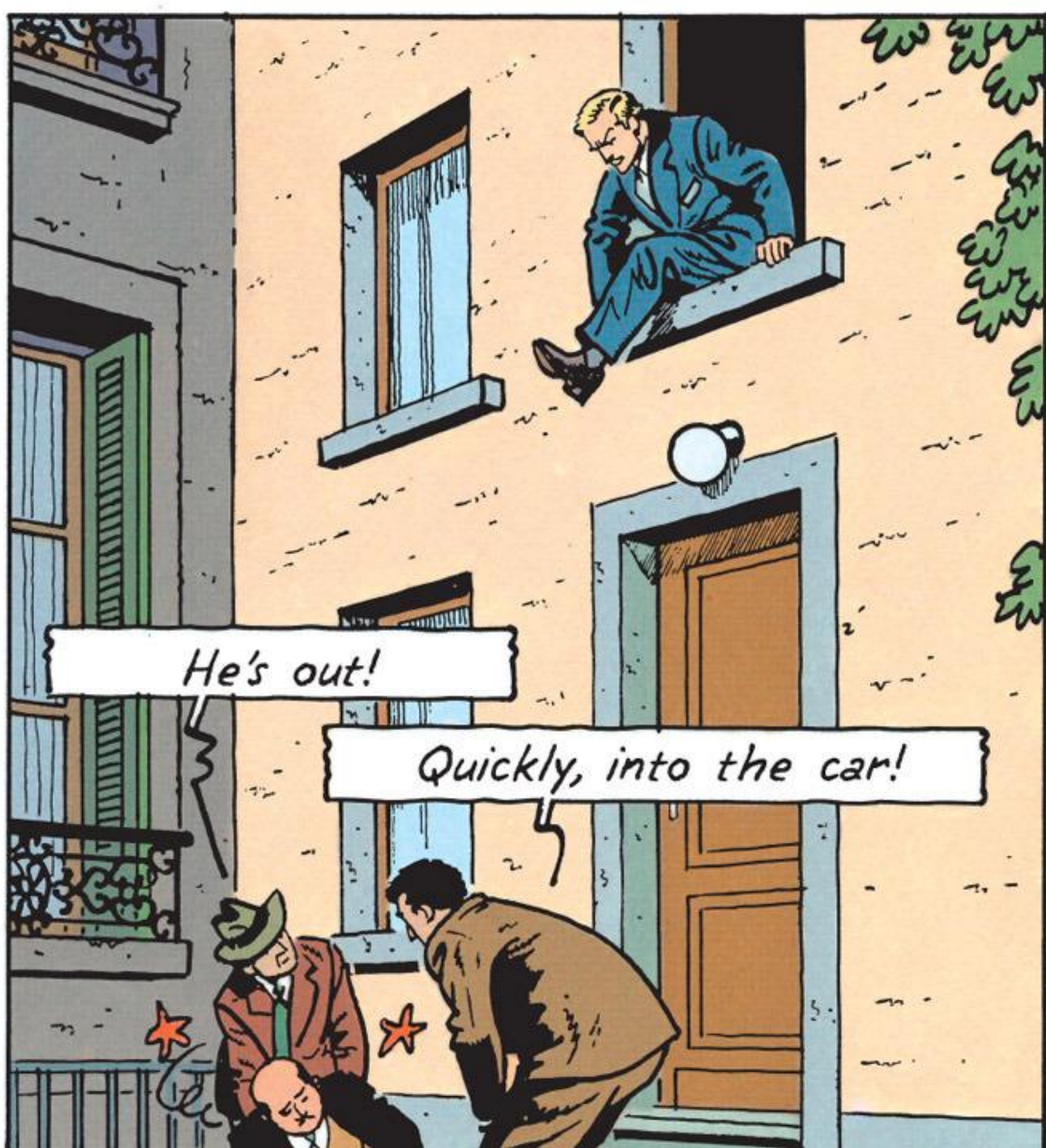
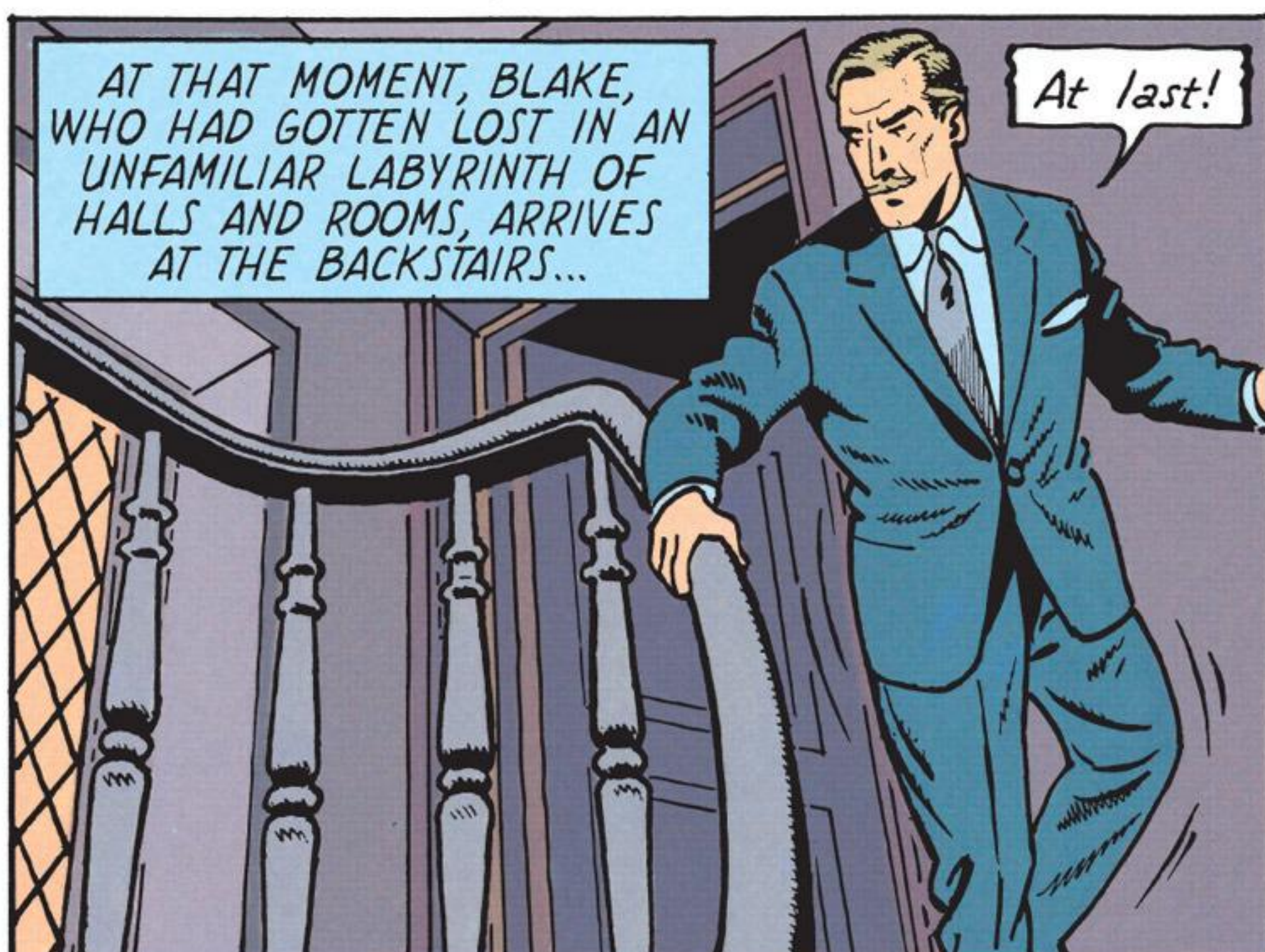




WHILE BLAKE RUSHES TOWARDS THE BACKSTAIRS, MORTIMER DASHES DOWN THE MAIN STAIRCASE. BUT HE'S BARELY SET FOOT ON THE FIRST STEP WHEN...



IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE HE IS DOWN IN THE HALL, WHERE THE JEWELLER IS STRUGGLING FIERCELY AGAINST THE TWO FAKE INSPECTORS...



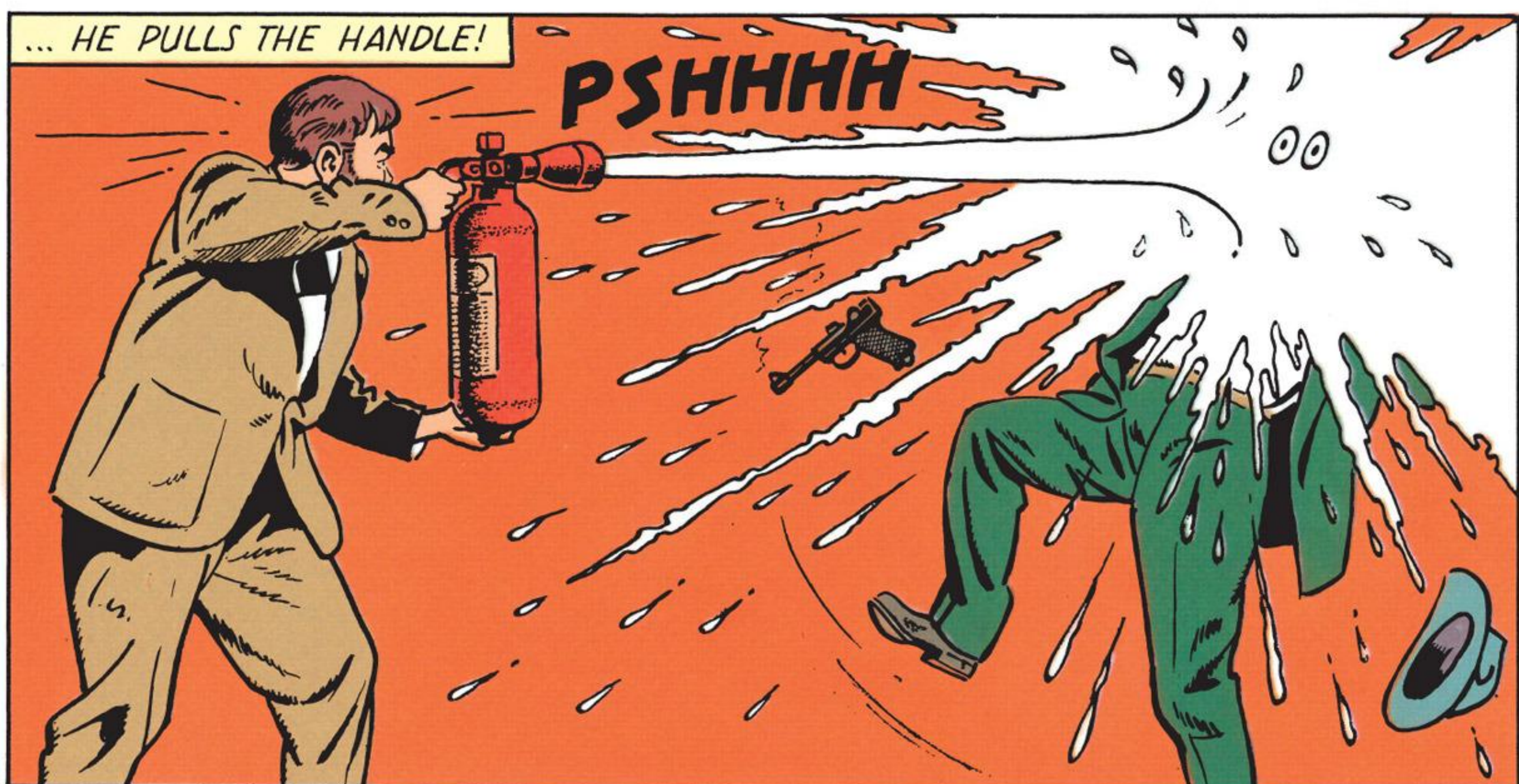
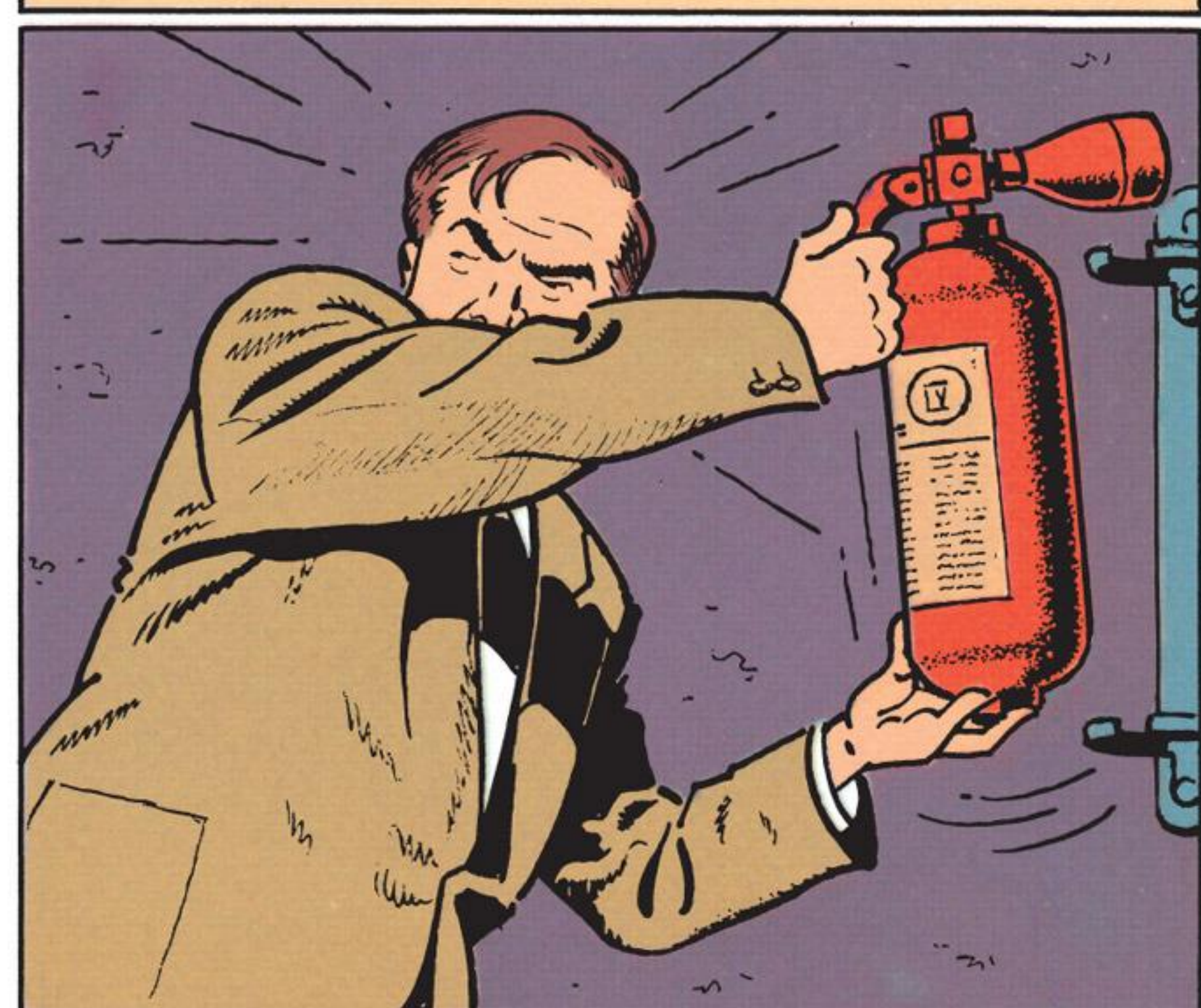
MEANWHILE, USING THE THREAT OF HIS LUGER, SHARKEY HAS PUSHED MORTIMER INTO THE CLOSET, WHERE VINCENT THE MANSERVANT ALREADY LIES UNCONSCIOUS...



BUT A SHOUT COMING FROM THE COURTYARD STARTLES HIM...



TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE BANDIT'S PROVIDENTIAL INATTENTION, MORTIMER SWIFTLY GRABS A FIRE EXTINGUISHER FROM THE WALL BEFORE HIM...



AT THE SAME TIME IN THE COURTYARD, BLAKE'S SITUATION IS CRITICAL, FOR, ALONG WITH THE DRIVER, THE LOOKOUT HAS JUST ARRIVED...



BUT FORTUNATELY, A HALF-BLINDED SHARKEY COMES STUMBLING ALONG, PURSUED BY THE PROFESSOR...



ABANDONING THE FIGHT SUDDENLY, THE GANGSTERS PILE INTO THE VAN, WHICH IMMEDIATELY TAKES OFF...

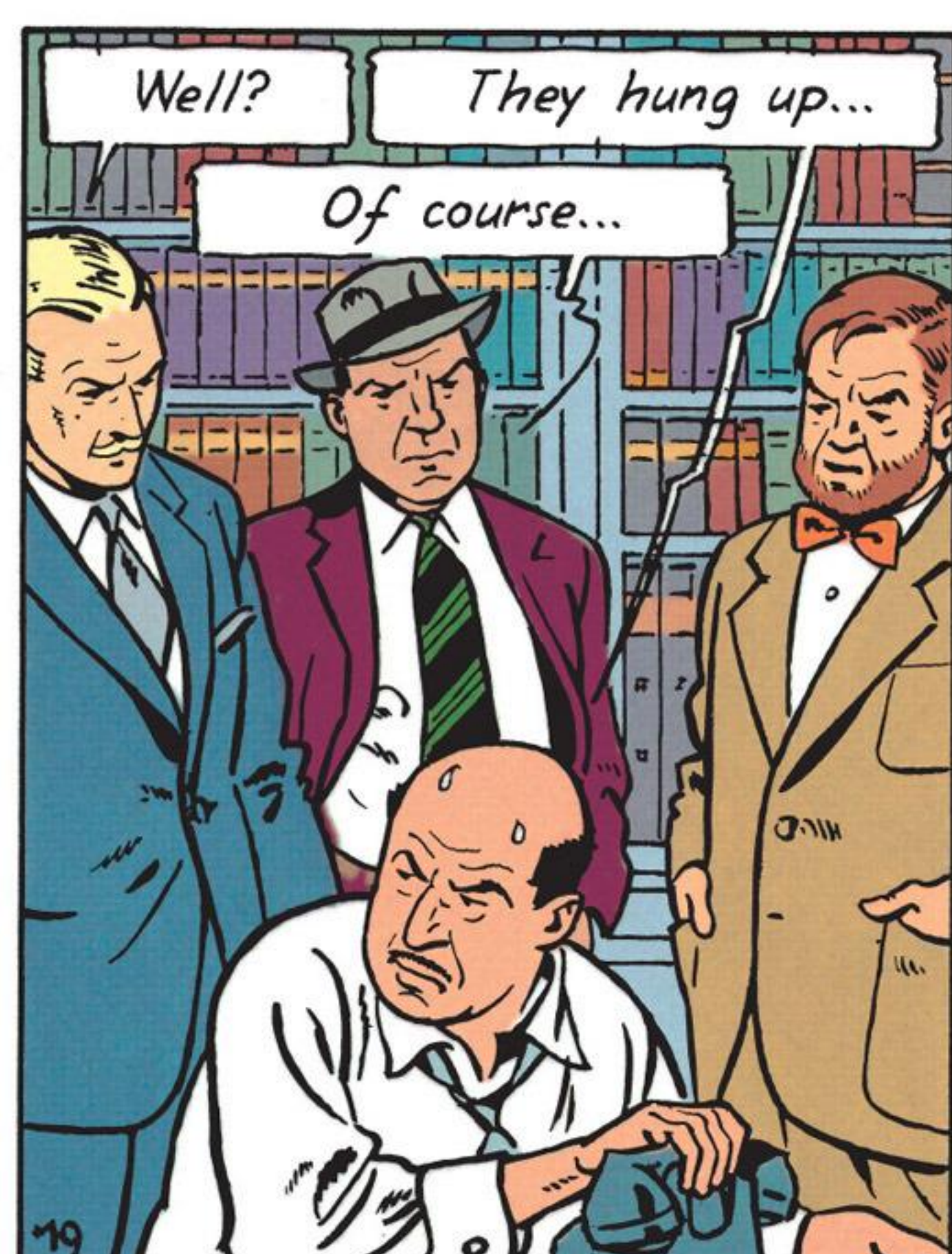
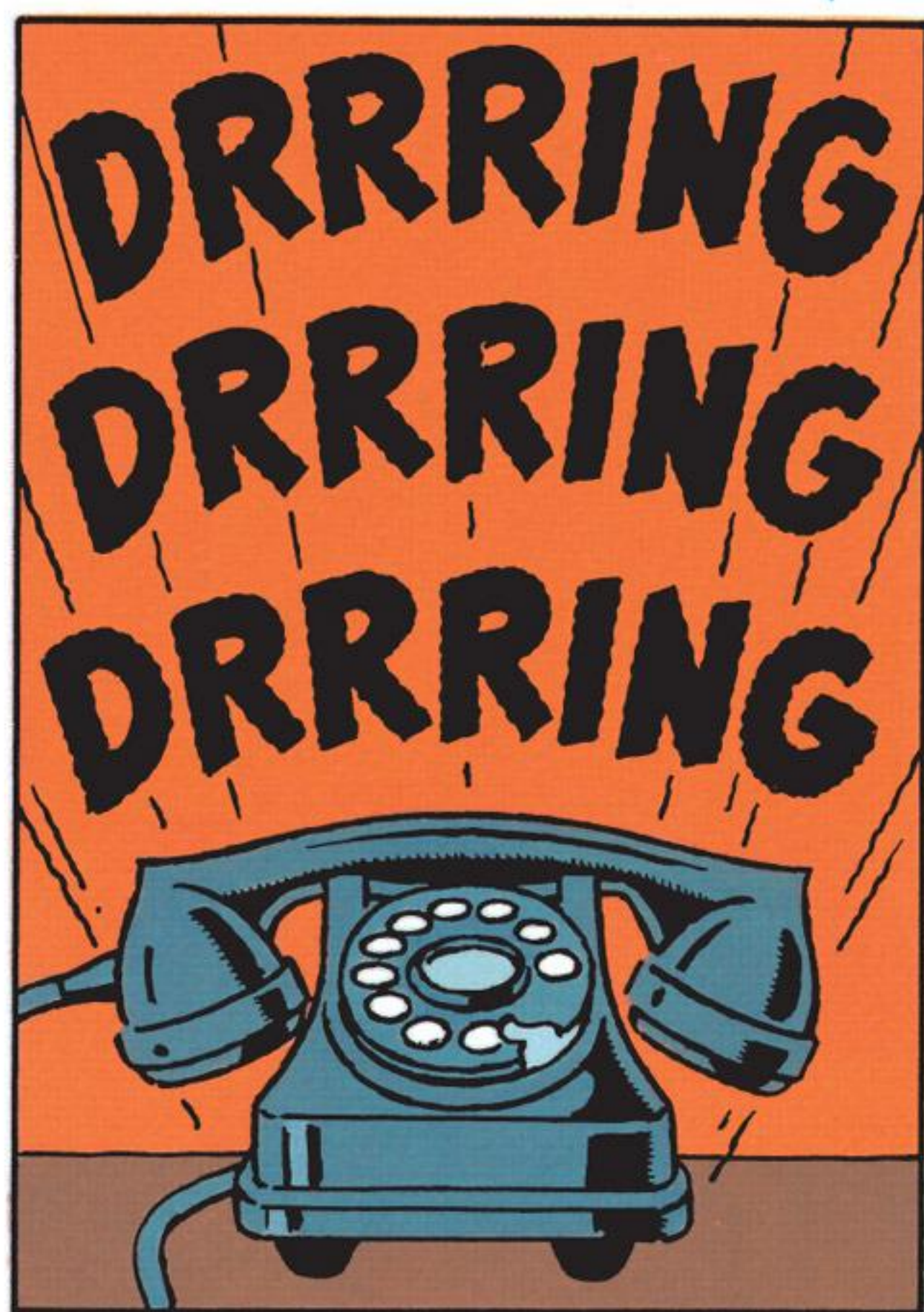
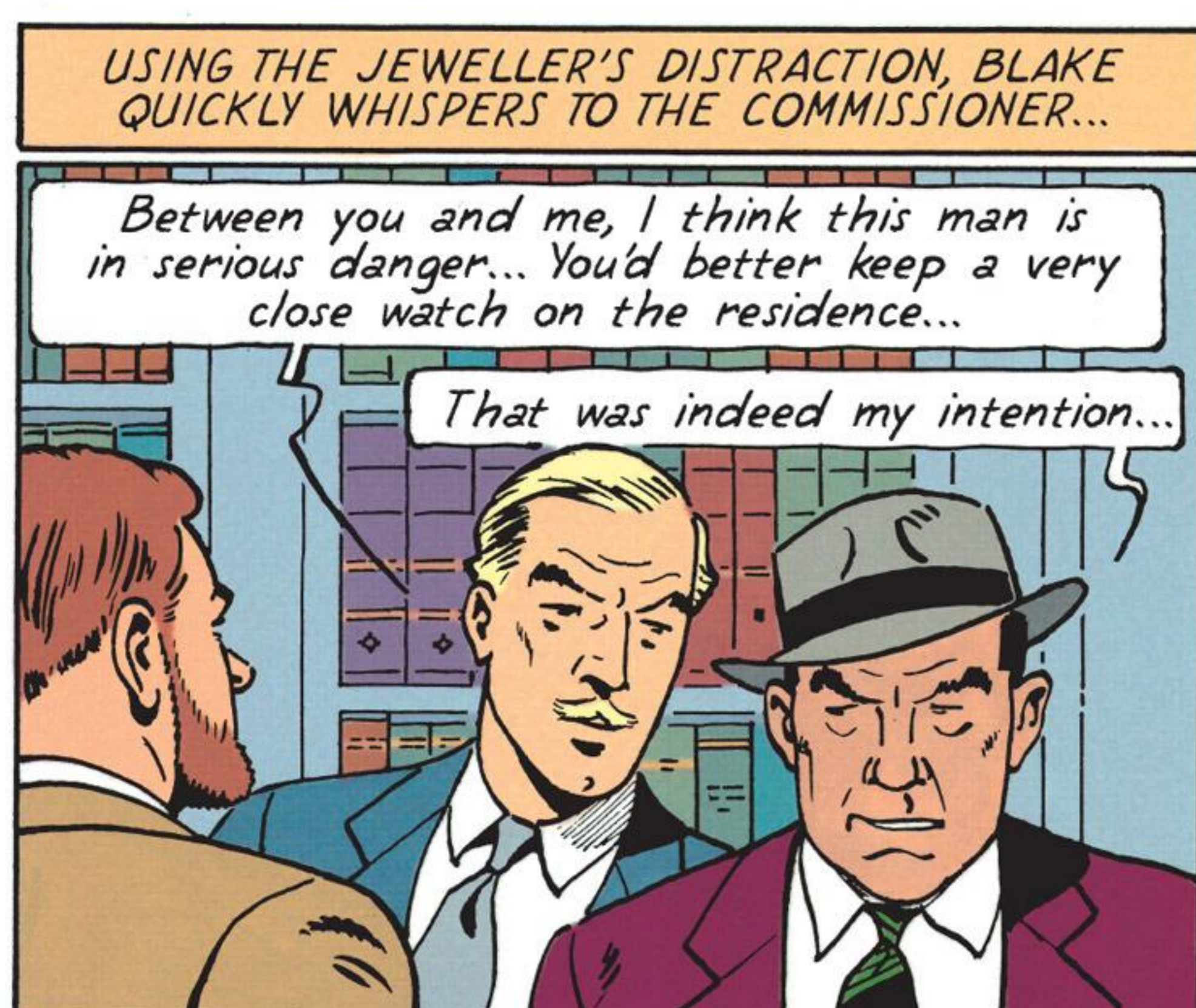
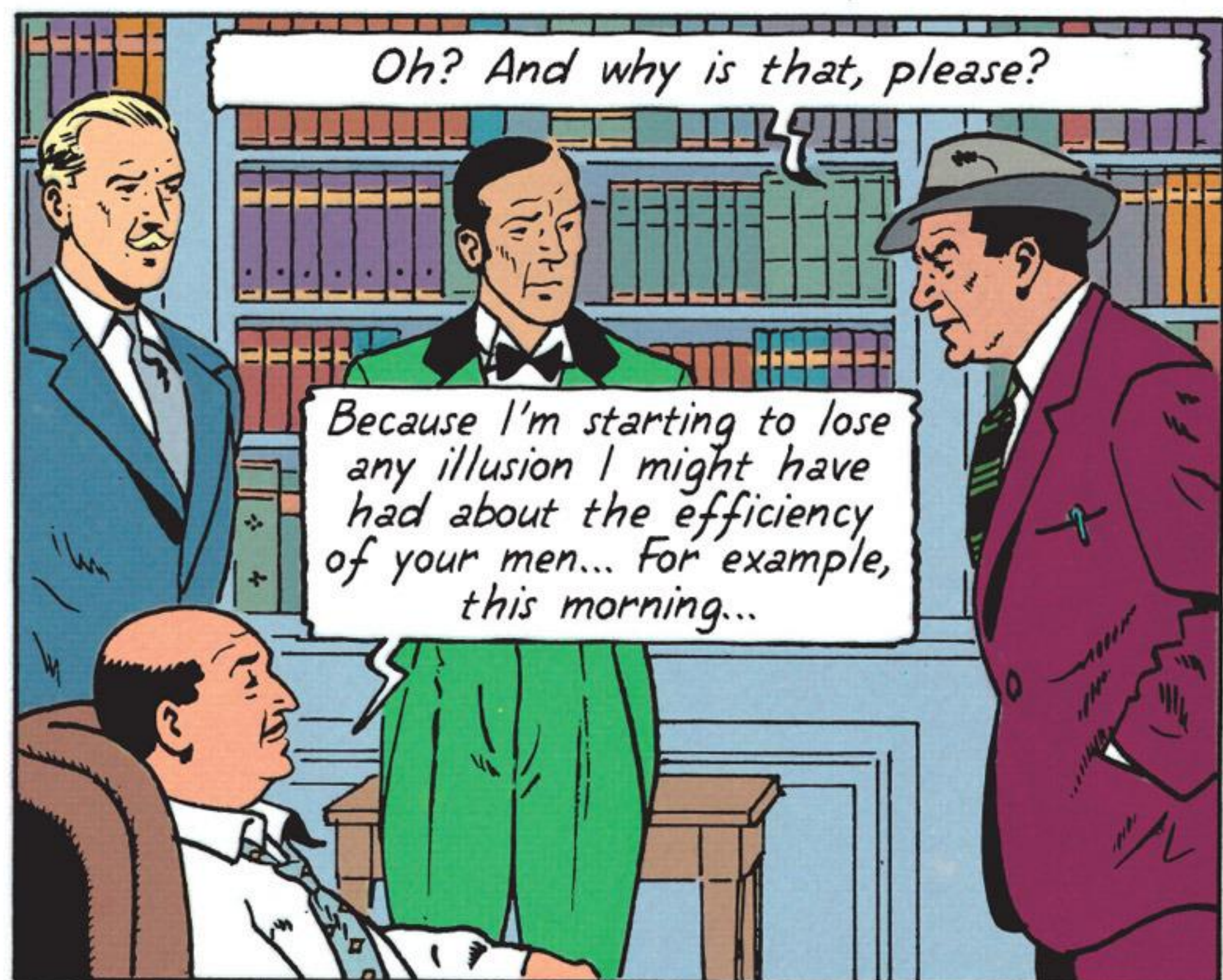
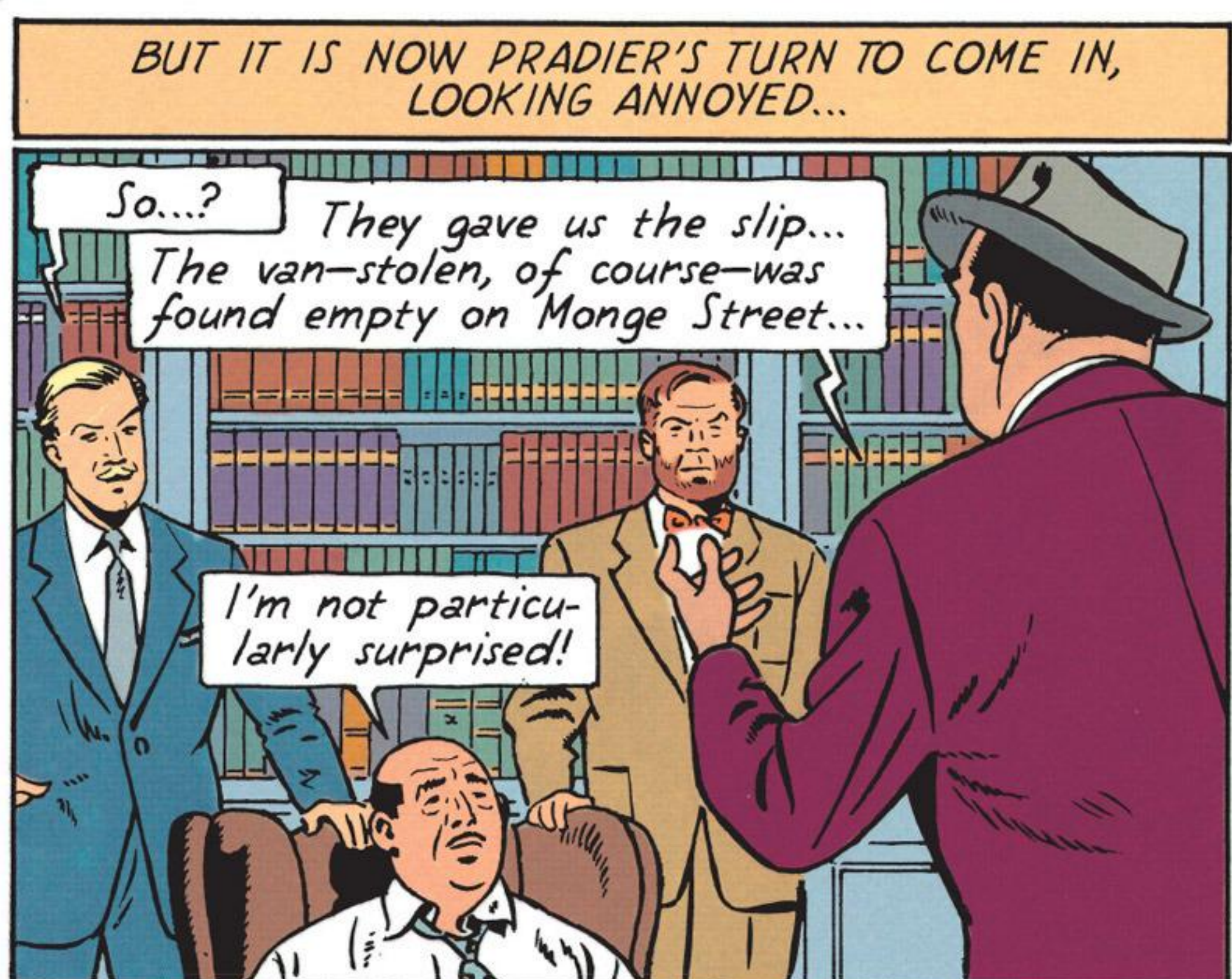
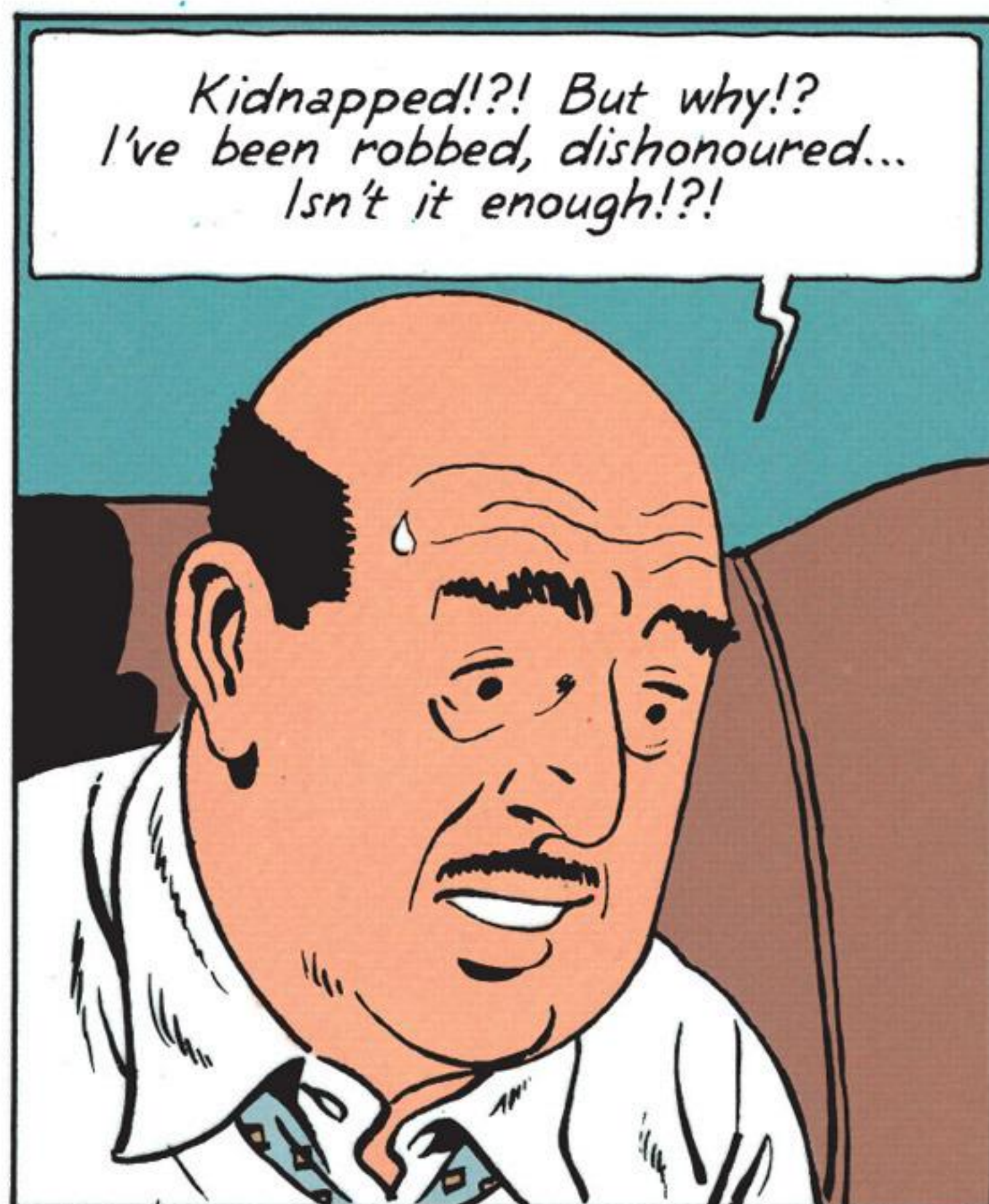
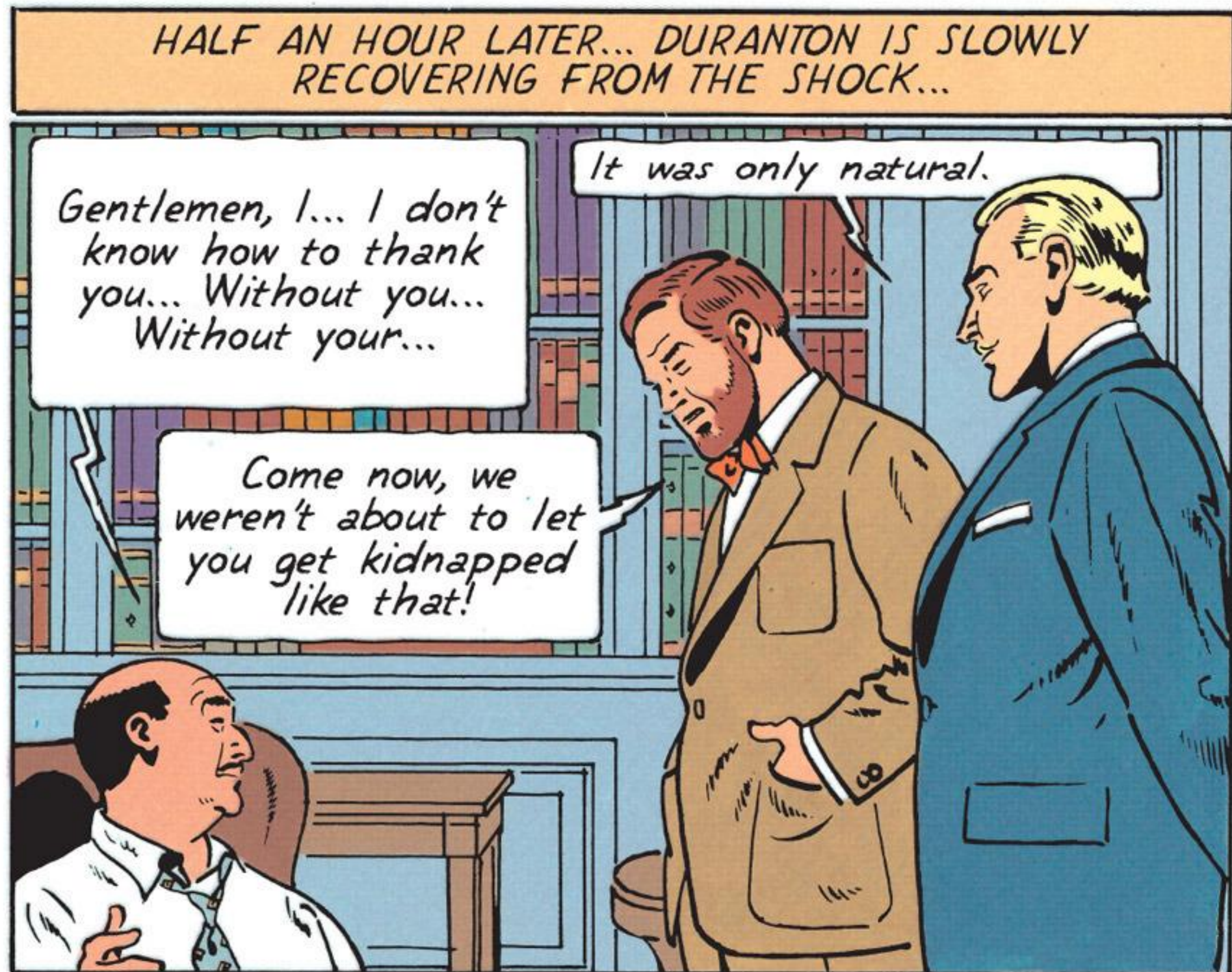


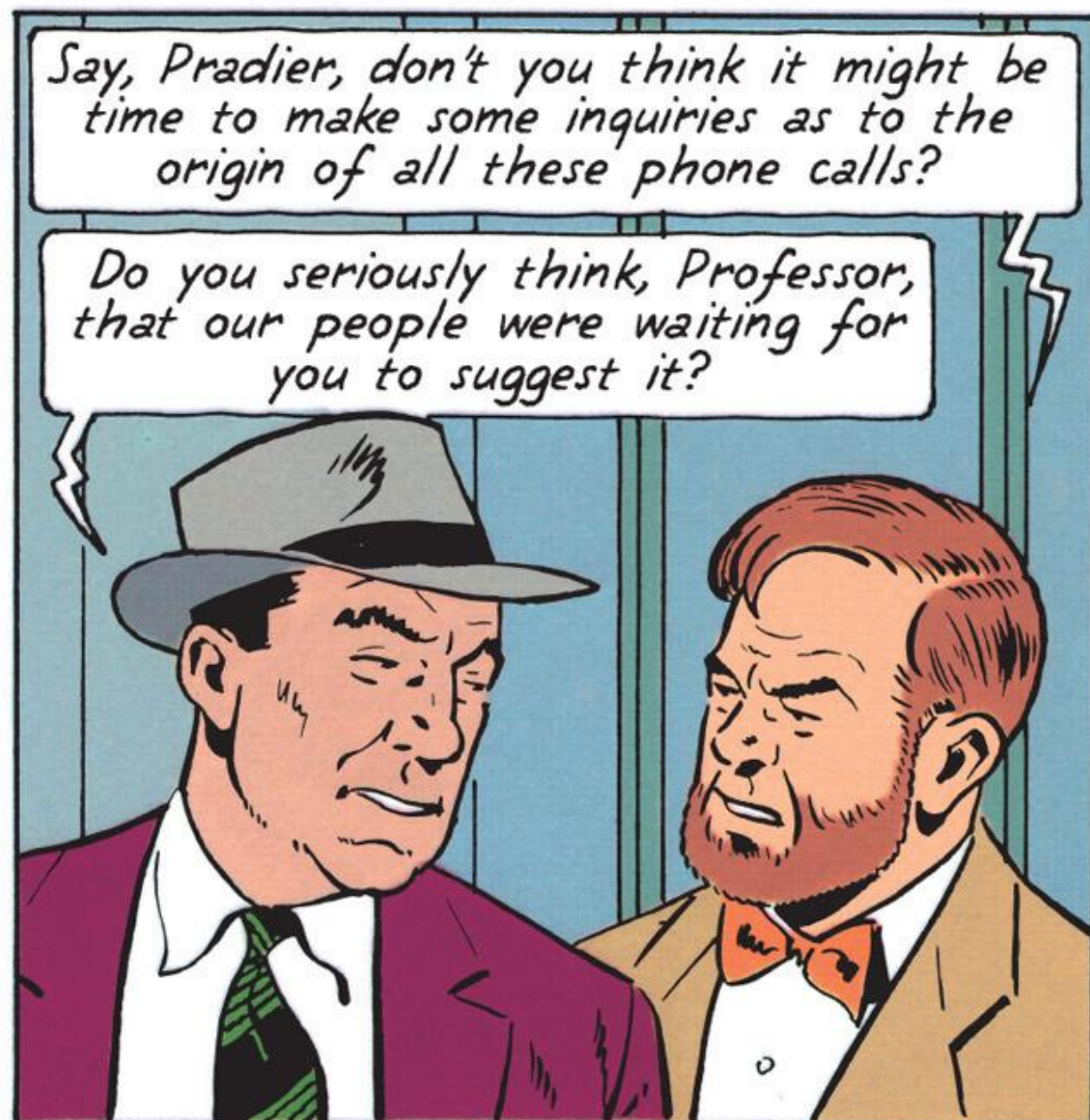
... ROARS THROUGH THE GATE...



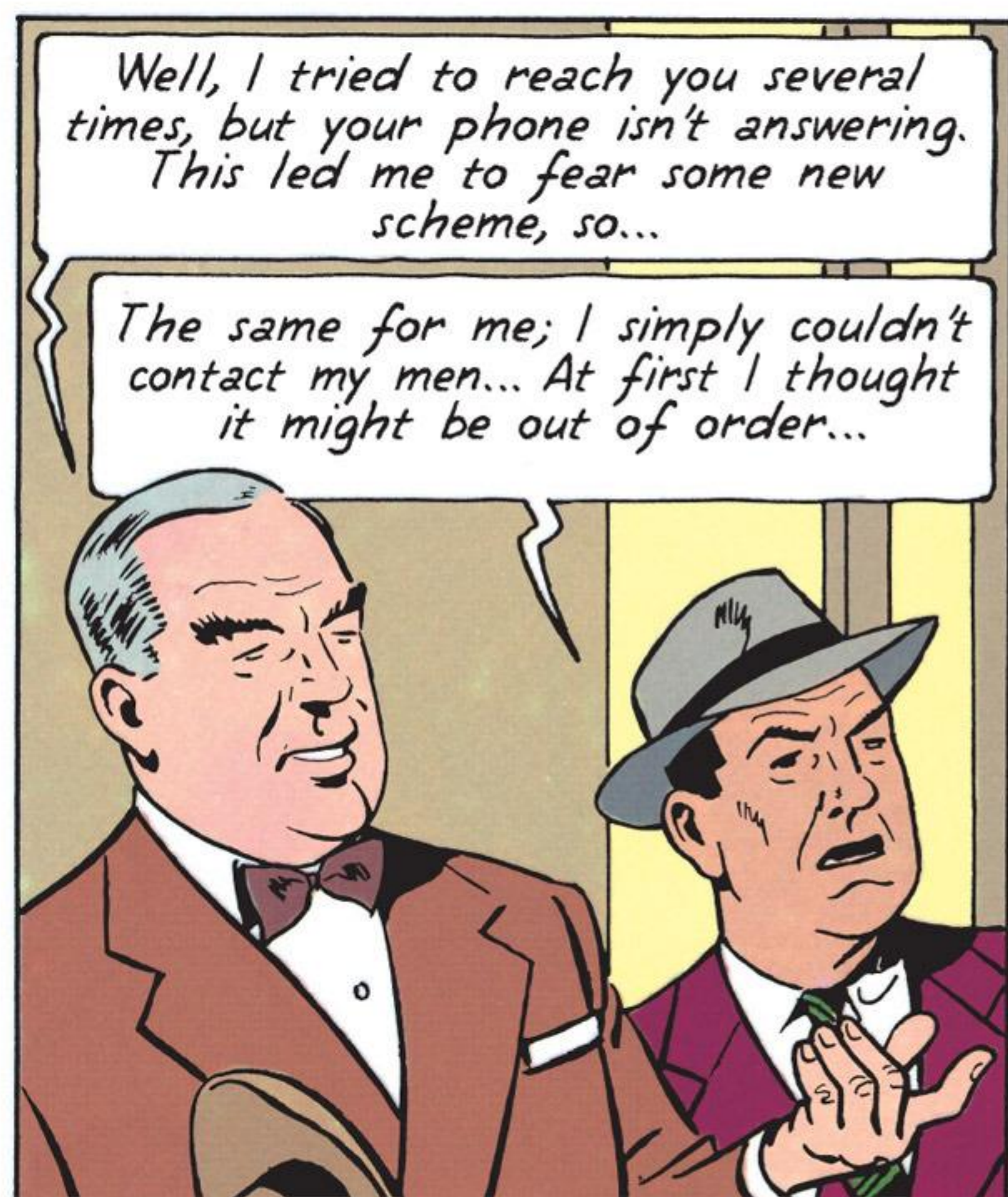
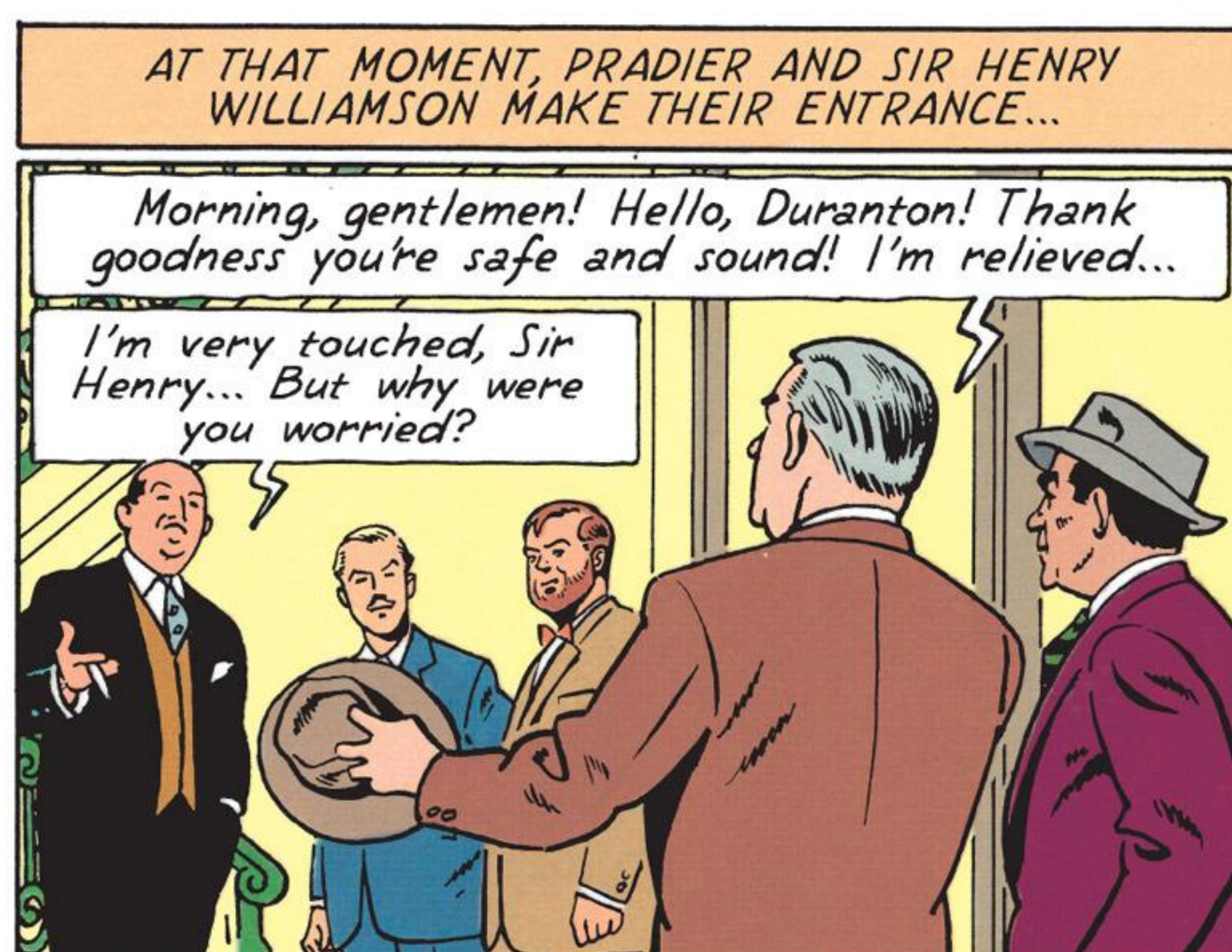
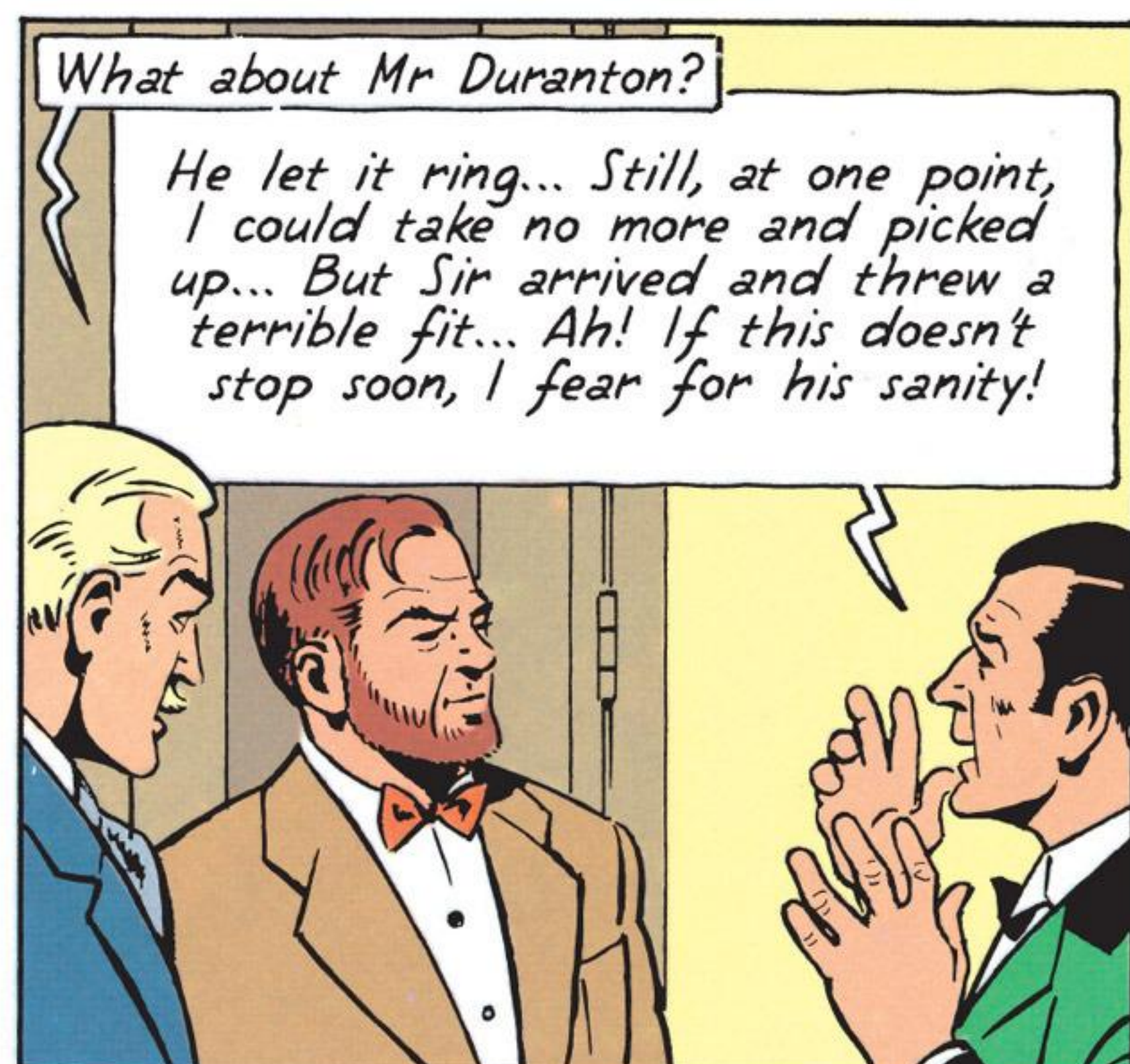
... ZOOMS DOWN THE STREET AND DISAPPEARS.

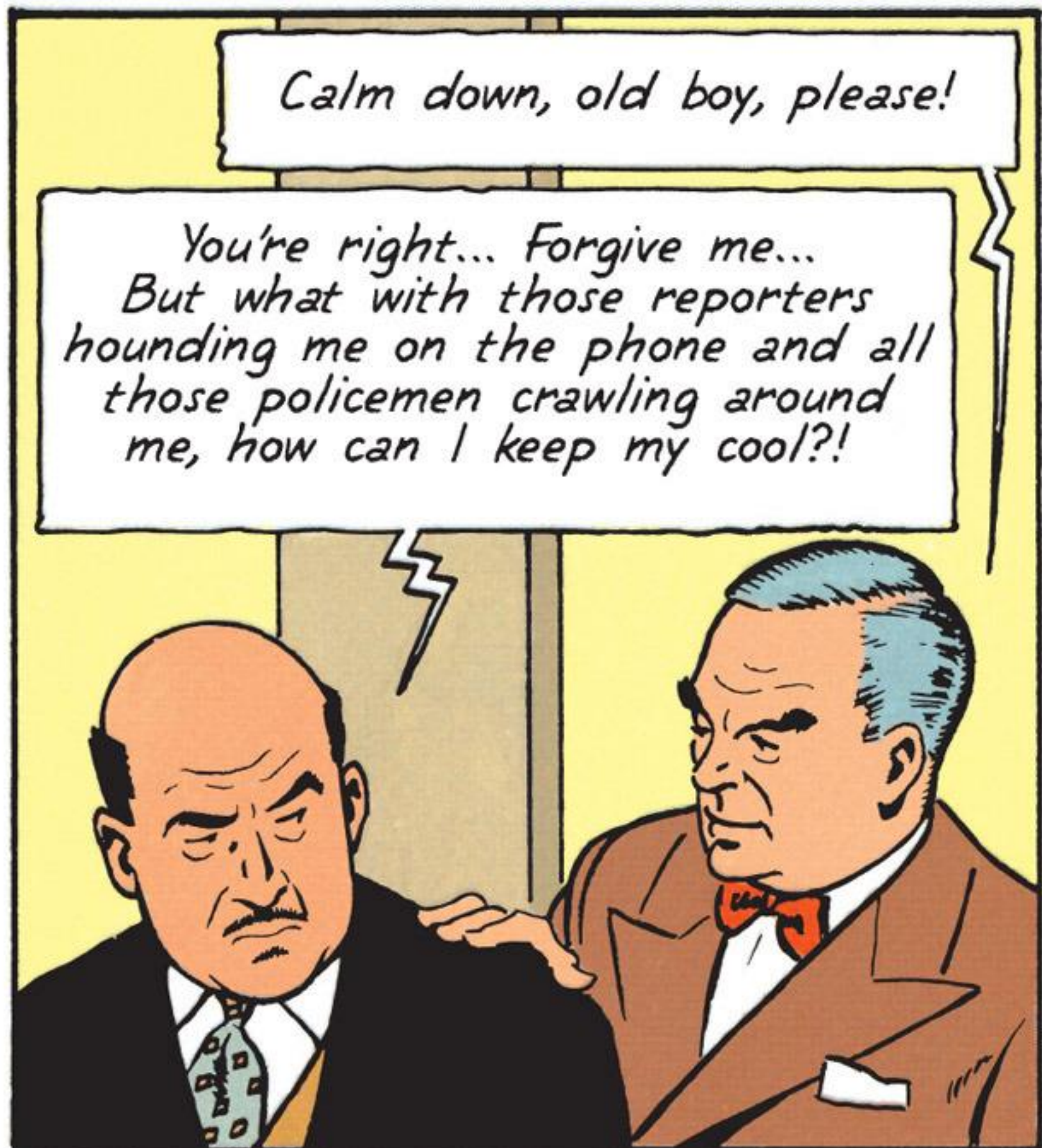






WHEN THEY ARRIVE THE NEXT MORNING, BLAKE AND MORTIMER FIND THE DURANTTON RESIDENCE UNDER TIGHT SURVEILLANCE, AND IT IS ONLY WITH THE PASS ISSUED BY THE COMMISSIONER THAT THEY ARE ALLOWED TO ENTER THE BUILDING.





Calm down, old boy, please!

You're right... Forgive me... But what with those reporters hounding me on the phone and all those policemen crawling around me, how can I keep my cool?!



No doubt, no doubt... Still, you're not making my job easier... And as for that darned telephone...

Commissioner, Mr Durantton is right... He needs some calm. Let's leave the telephone alone for the moment, and restrict police presence to the bare minimum needed...

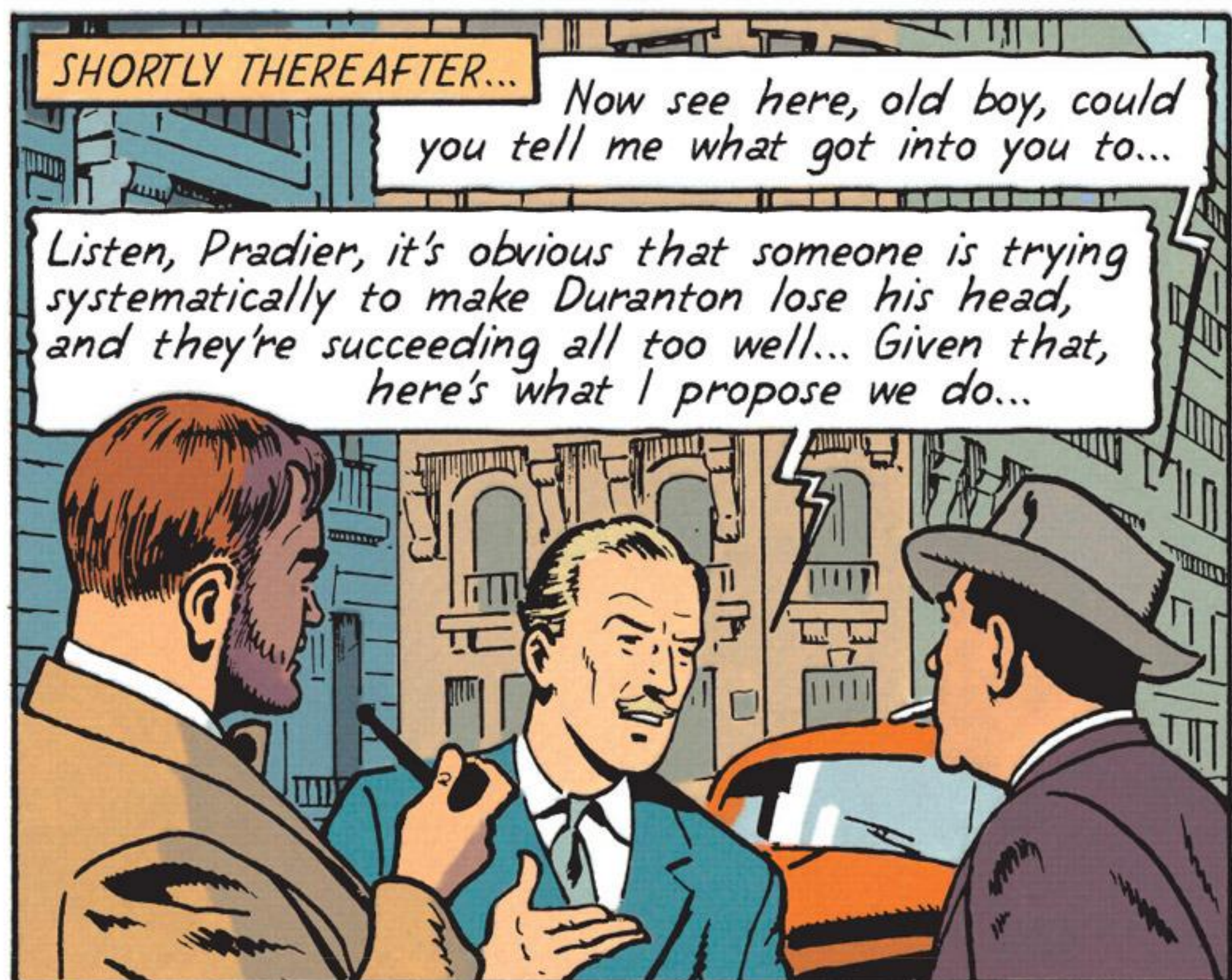
What!?!



We'll do our utmost to minimize unnecessary hassle. But as for you, do try to relax somewhat...

Good thinking, Blake!

Thank you, Captain... Thank you for your intervention...



SHORTLY THEREAFTER...

Now see here, old boy, could you tell me what got into you to...

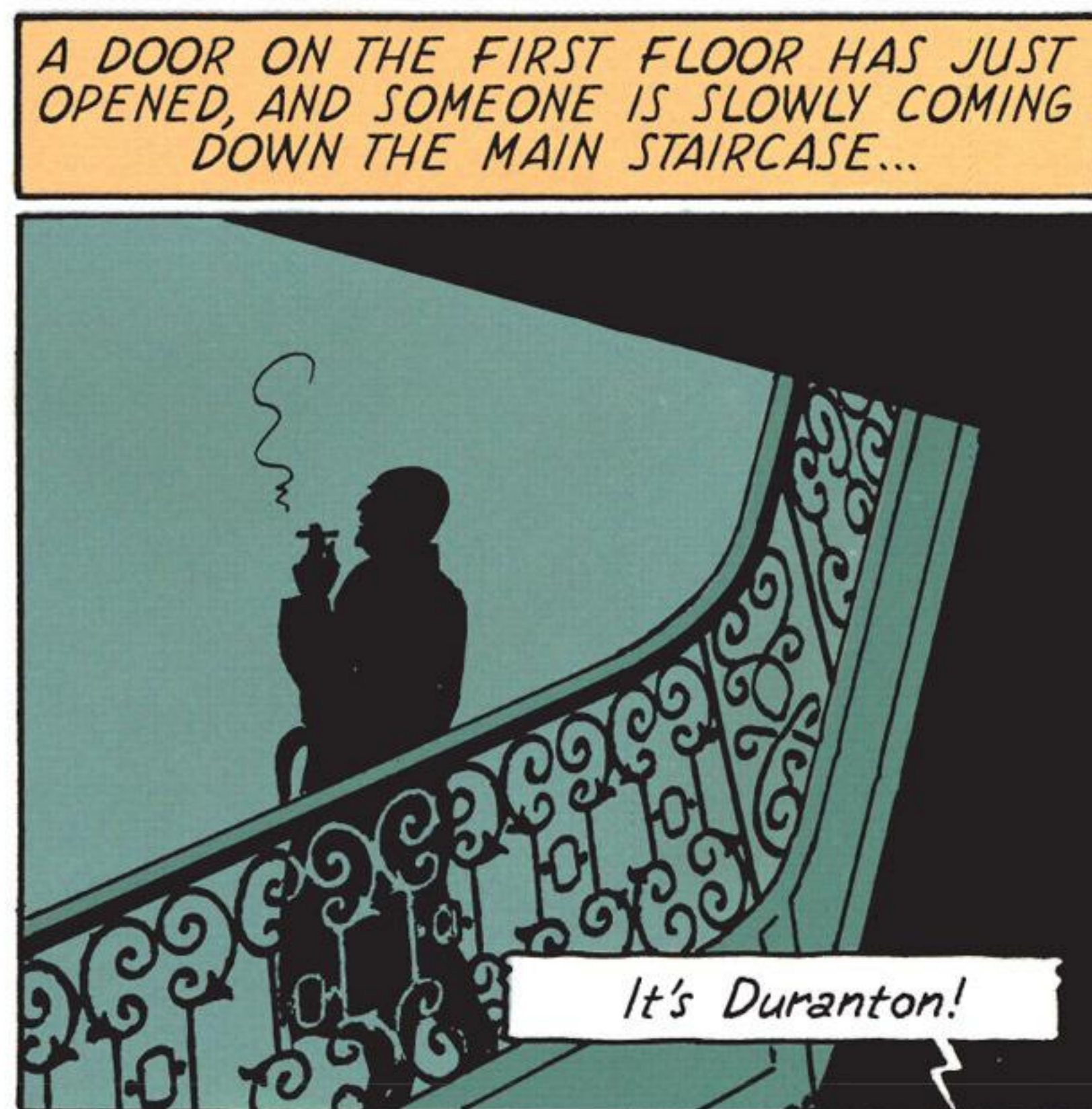
Listen, Pradier, it's obvious that someone is trying systematically to make Durantton lose his head, and they're succeeding all too well... Given that, here's what I propose we do...



THE NEXT NIGHT IN THE DURANTTON RESIDENCE, EVERYTHING IS QUIET... BUT AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE STAIRS THAT LEAD TO THE BASEMENT, BLAKE AND MORTIMER ARE KEEPING WATCH...

Nothing strange so far...

Shh!

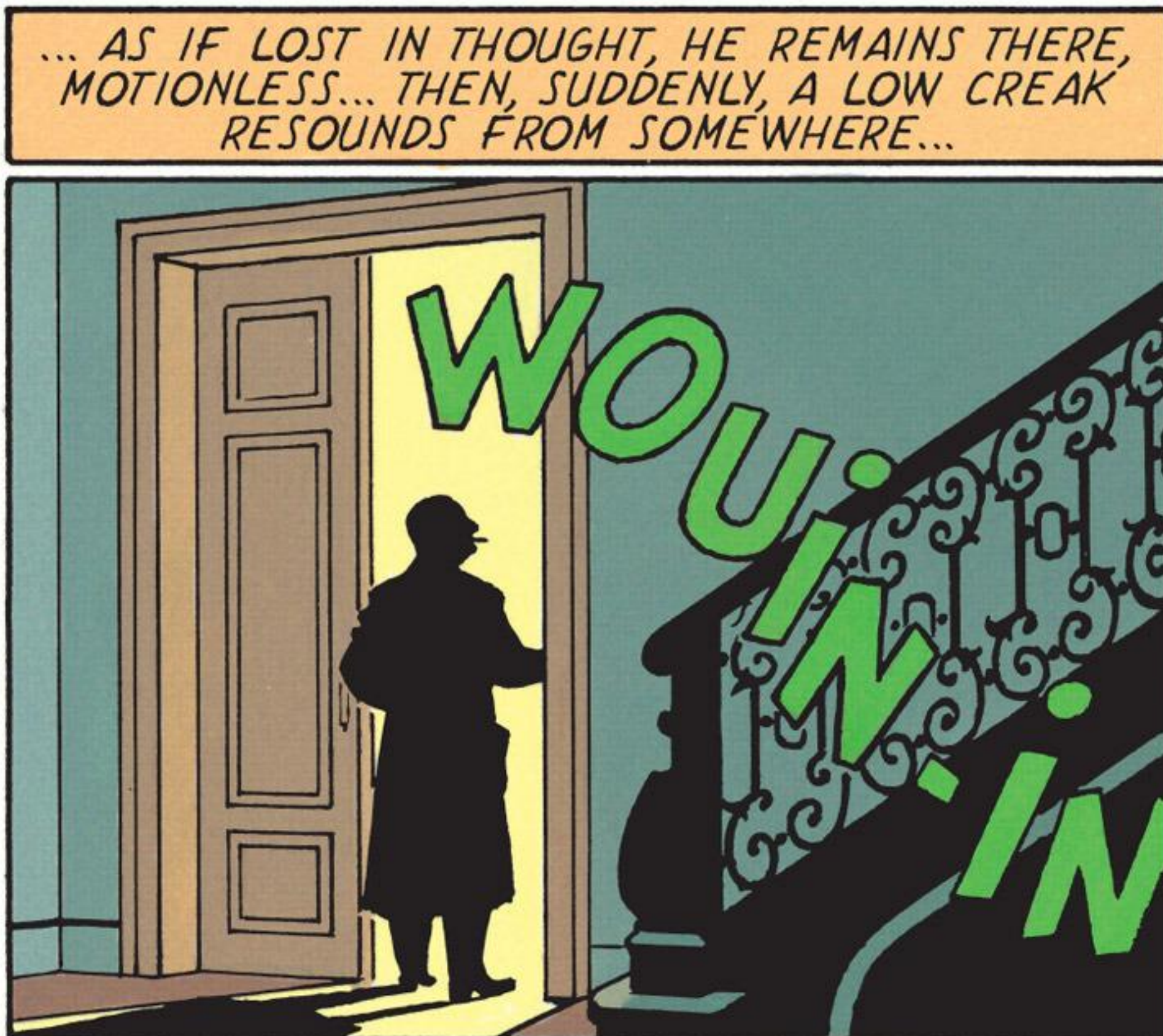


A DOOR ON THE FIRST FLOOR HAS JUST OPENED, AND SOMEONE IS SLOWLY COMING DOWN THE MAIN STAIRCASE...

It's Durantton!



ONCE IN THE HALL, THE JEWELLER OPENS THE DOOR TO THE LIBRARY, TURNS THE LIGHT ON AND STOPS ON THE DOORSTEP...



... AS IF LOST IN THOUGHT, HE REMAINS THERE, MOTIONLESS... THEN, SUDDENLY, A LOW CREAK RESOUNDS FROM SOMEWHERE...

WOU... IN... IN...



HEARING THE SOUND, DURANTTON HAS WHEELED AROUND, EYES FIXED UPON THE BACK OF THE HALL... HOLDING HIS BREATH...



... THEN, SUDDENLY, HE TURNS THE SWITCH AND RUSHES UP THE STAIRS...



Goodness me, he's fleeing!?

Quickly! Let's go see!!



TONG

21

MORTIMER DASHES FORWARD, BUT...

E.P.T.

... THEN THE DOOR, PUSHED BACK BRUTALLY, CATAPULTS HIM INTO BLAKE...



... AND THE TWO OF THEM TUMBLE ALL THE WAY DOWN THE STAIRS...



GINGERLY PRODDING AT THEIR BRUISED BODIES, THE TWO MEN STAND WITH DIFFICULTY...



Damn! We've been caught flatfooted like a couple of rookies!

Yeah... And to think it was at our request that Pradier sent his men away.



MMH-MH-MH

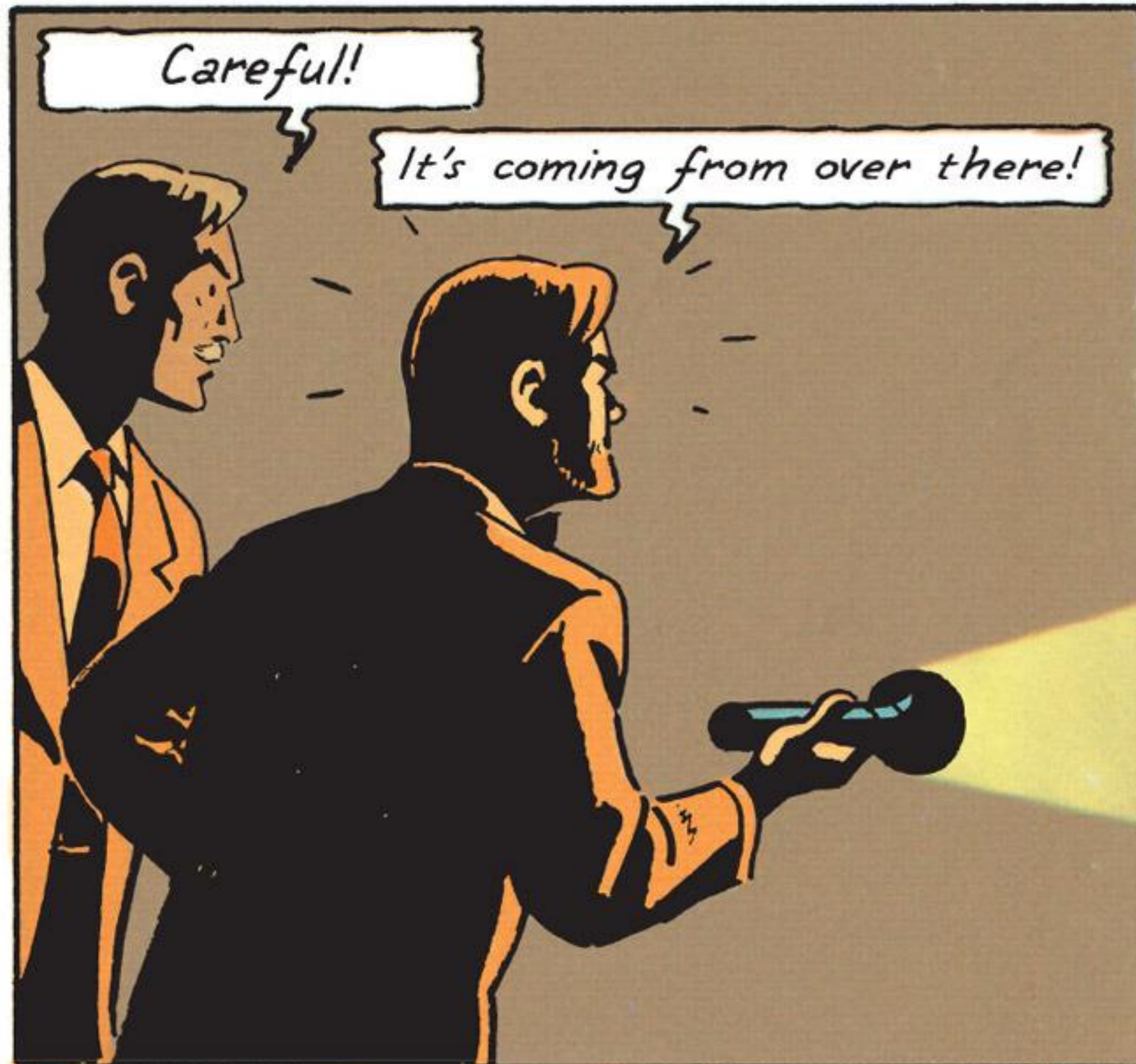
Listen!?!

Strange! It sounds like moans!



Careful!

It's coming from over there!



VINCENT!

What happened to you?!



I was keeping watch here in the dark, per your instructions, when I was suddenly attacked, gagged and bound by several men!

The devils! But...



WE FORGOT DURANTON!!

BLIMEY!!



THE THREE MEN RUN BACK UP THE STAIRS...

He must have taken refuge in his room!



Locked?!? Had to be expected!

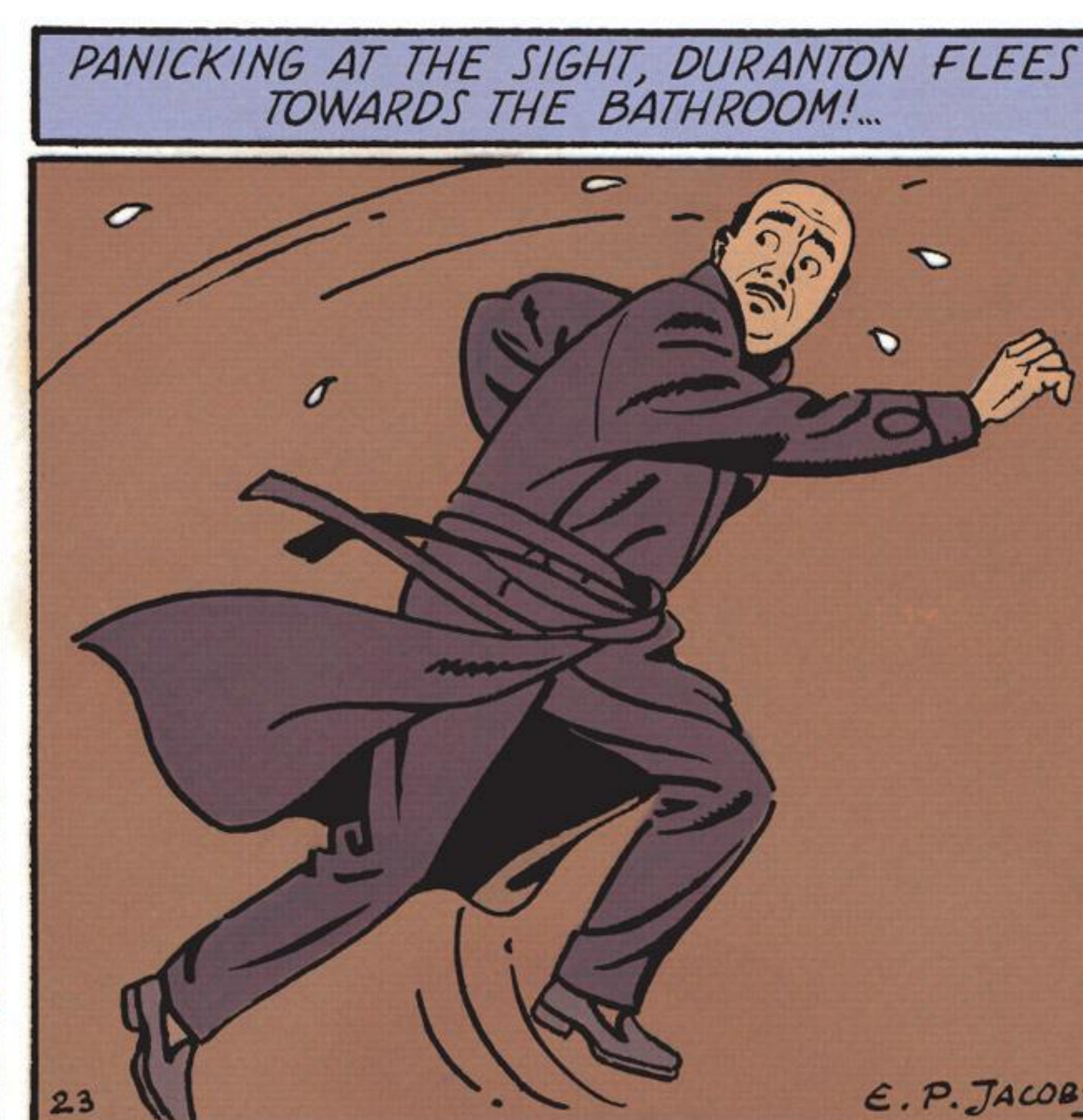
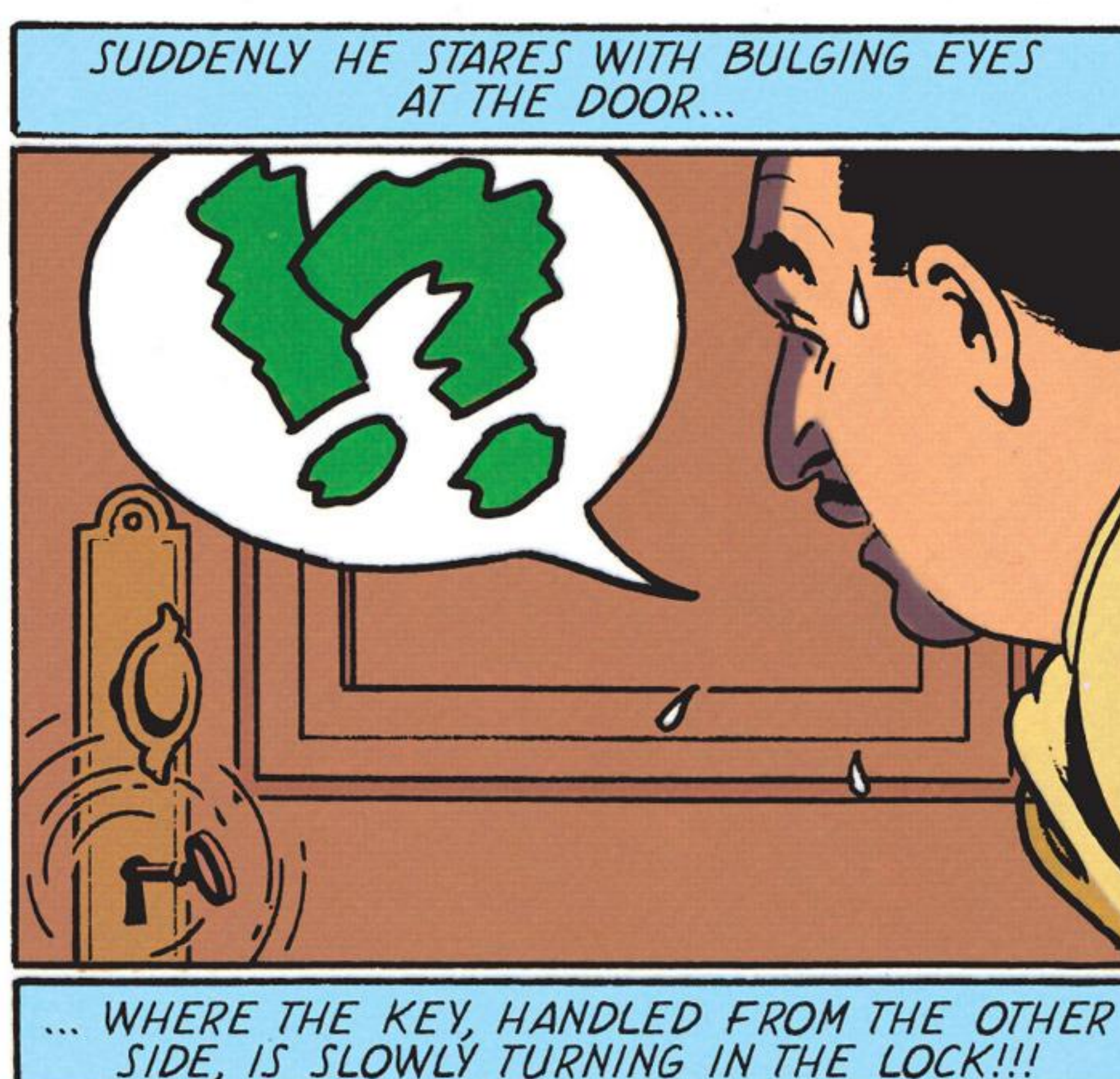
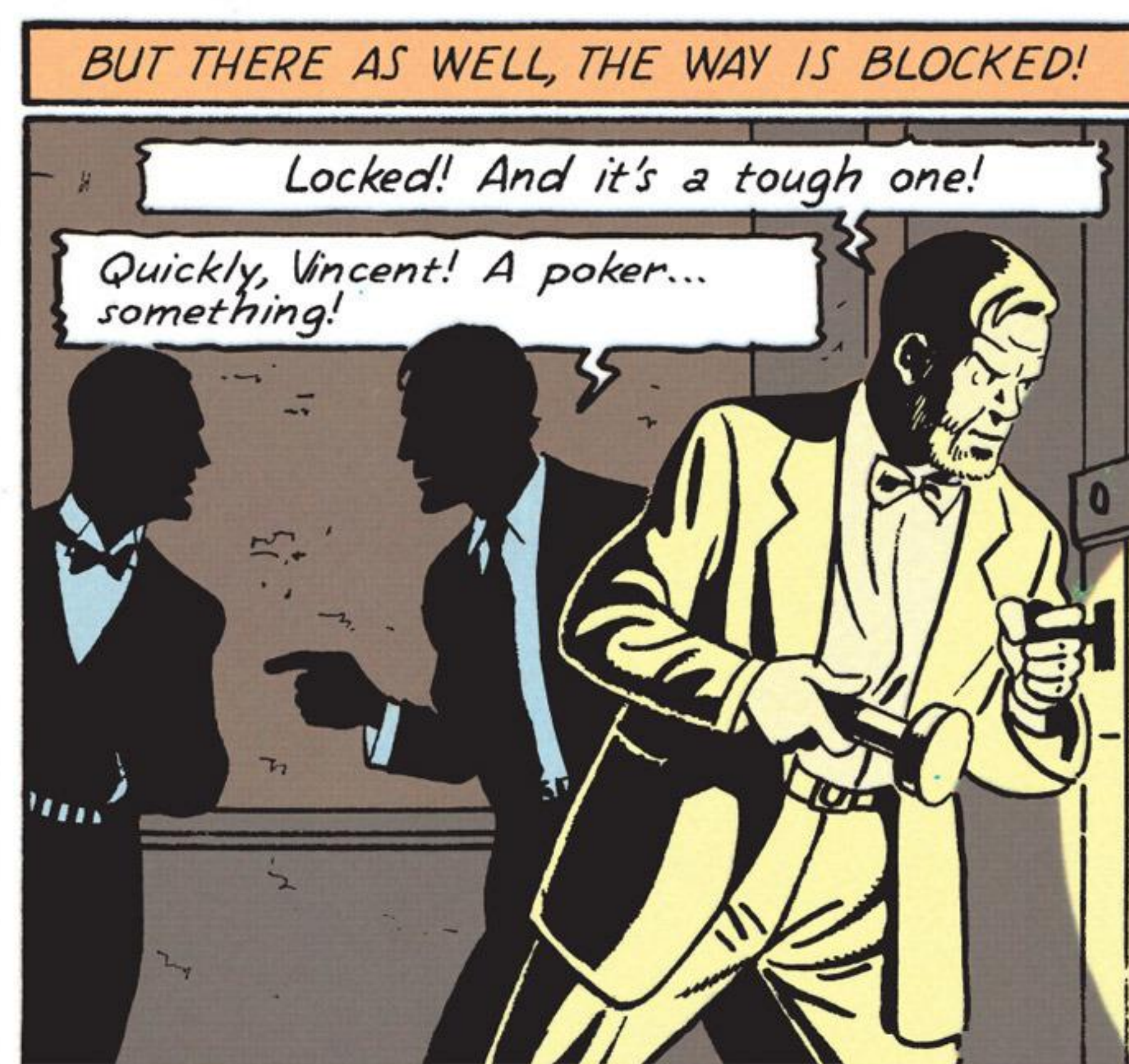
Well, then, let's break it open!!



BUT AT THAT MOMENT...

PLOP PLOP PLOP





... AND RUSHES INSIDE JUST AS THE BANDITS BURST INTO THE BEDROOM!!



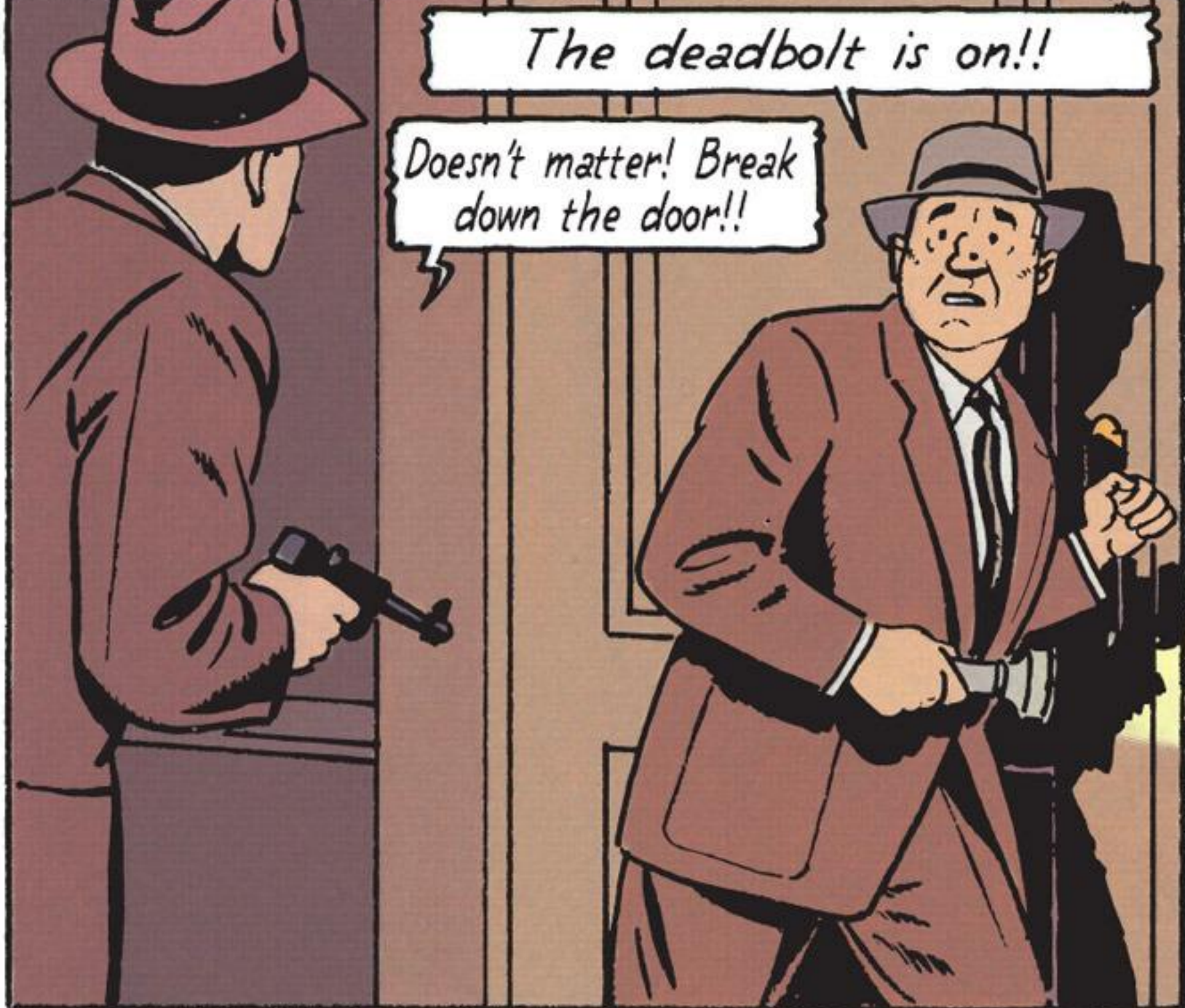
MEANWHILE, AT THE SAME TIME IN THE BASEMENT, THE DOOR HAS JUST GIVEN...



And now, how can we get to Durantont's room?



TIME IS INDEED OF THE ESSENCE...



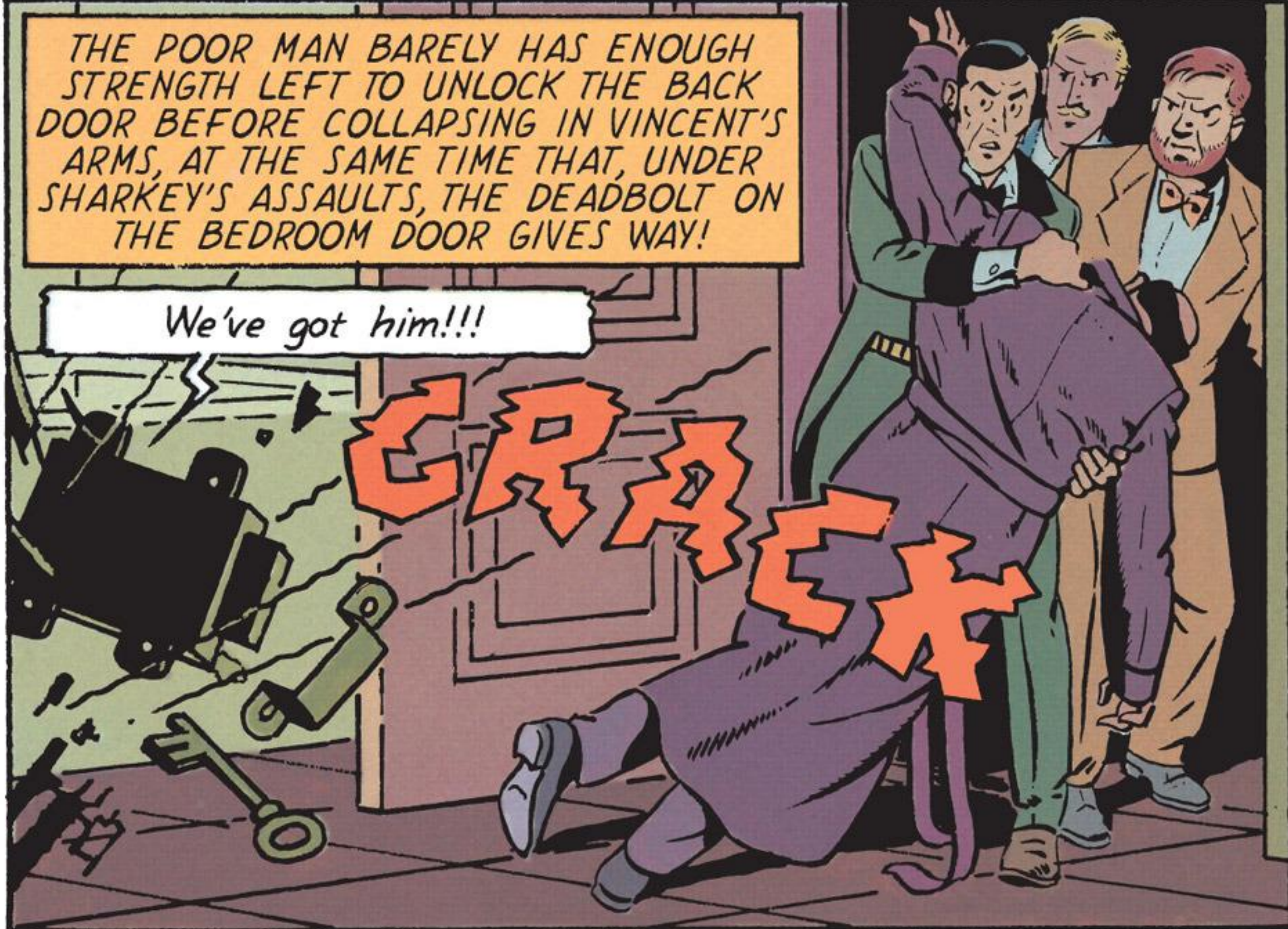
ALREADY, DURANTON IS DASHING TOWARDS THE BACKSTAIRS...

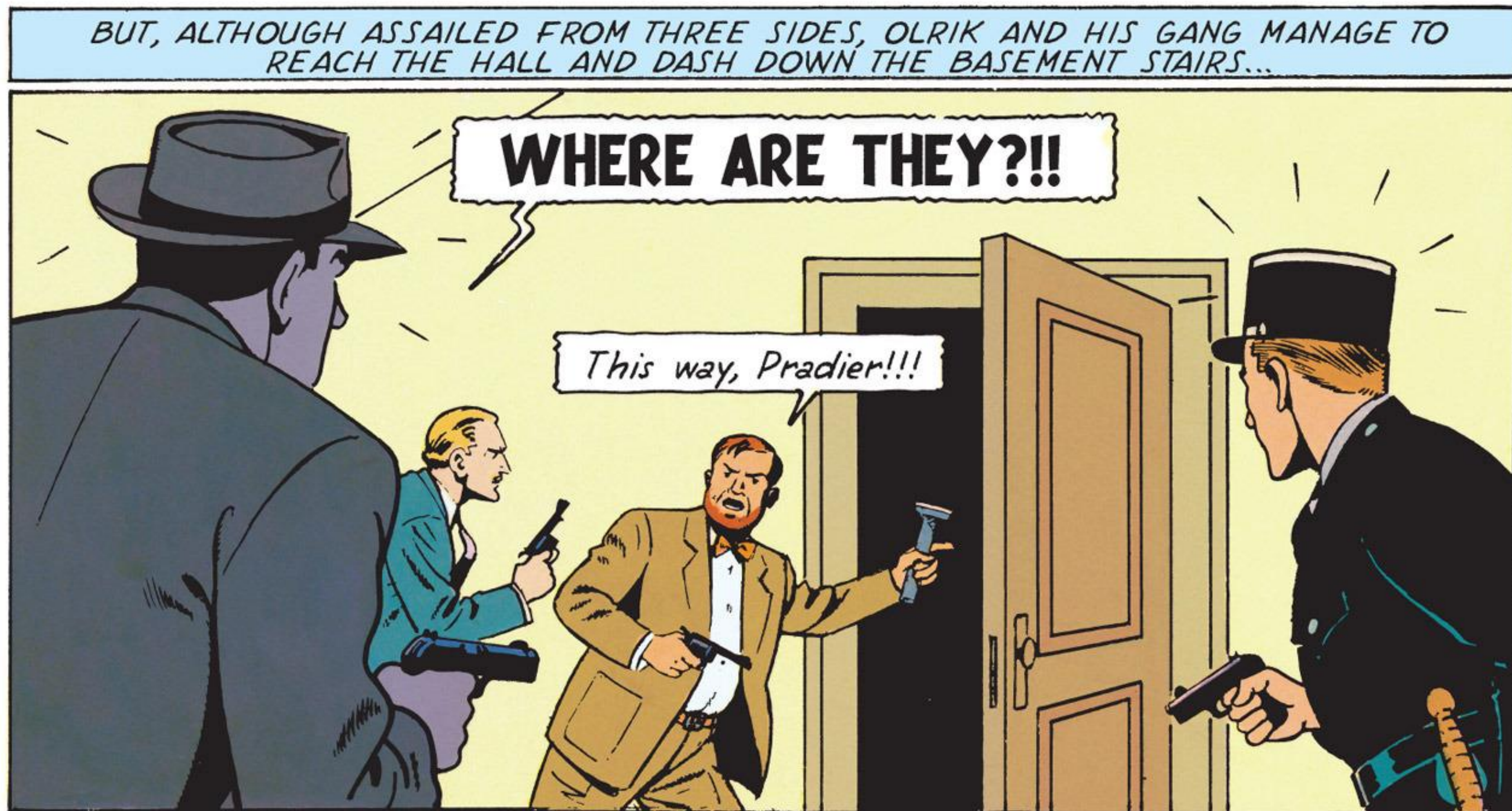
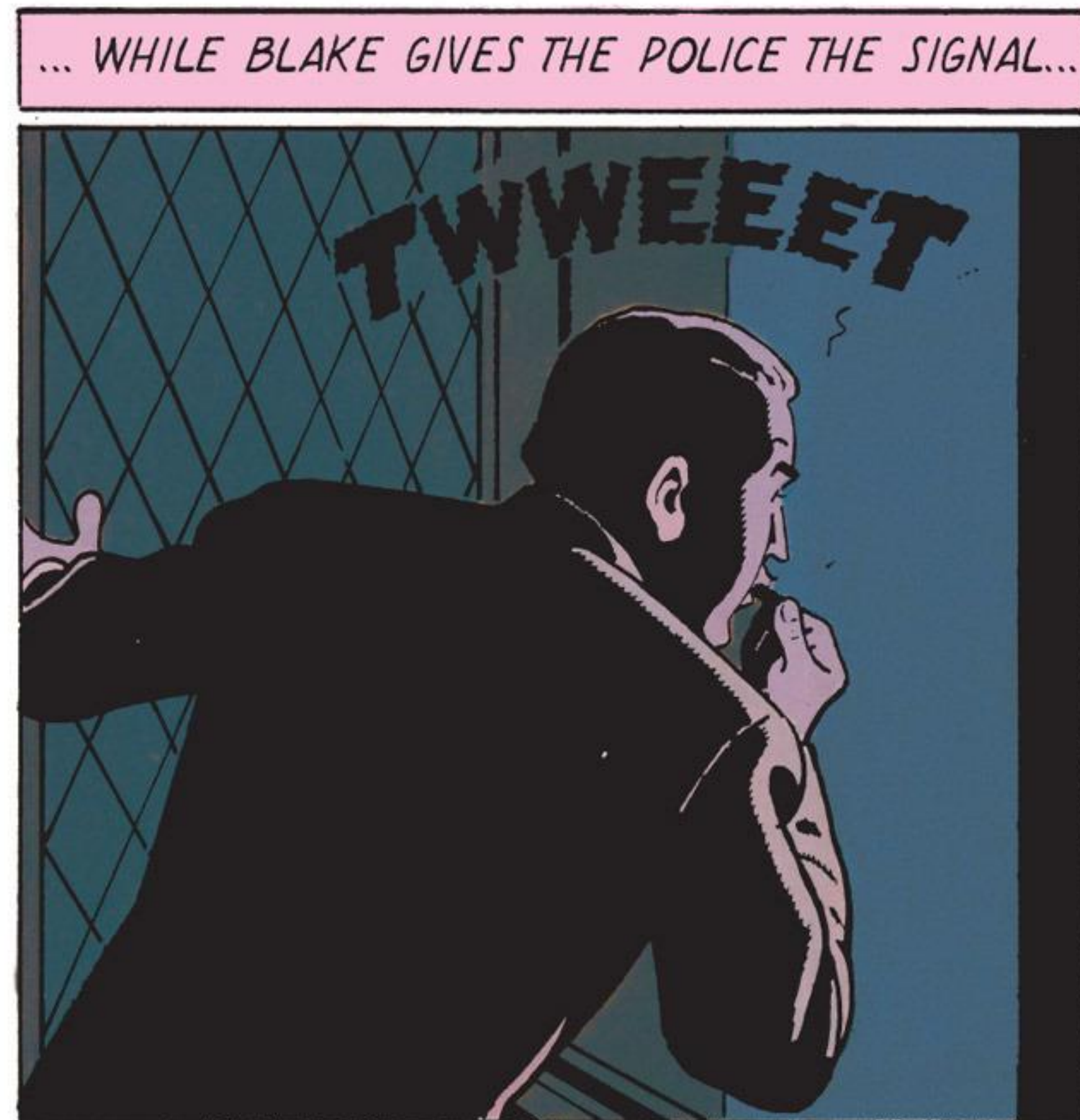


... BUT HE STOPS DEAD ON THE LANDING!



BELIEVING HIMSELF TRAPPED, THE UNFORTUNATE JEWELLER CLOSSES THE DOOR, PUSHES THE BOLT AND STARTS SHOUTING...





HURLING DOWN ON THE VERY HEELS OF THE FLEEING BANDITS, OUR FRIENDS AND THE POLICE REACH THE STEEL DOOR!



A LAST FLIGHT OF STAIRS AND THEY STEP INTO THE CELLAR, STILL PARTIALLY FLOODED AND FILLED WITH DEBRIS...



HAVING CAUTIOUSLY STEPPED UP TO THE DOOR, MORTIMER TRIES TO HAVE A LOOK, BUT...



... SHARKEY IS THERE WAITING FOR HIM, AND...



HE BARELY HAS TIME TO THROW HIMSELF BACKWARDS.



WHEN, THE NEXT MOMENT, THE PURSUERS FINALLY ENTER THE ROOM, IT IS EMPTY...



BUT WHEN THE POLICEMEN EVENTUALLY SET FOOT INSIDE THE QUARRY, OF COURSE THERE IS NOT A TRACE OF THE FUGITIVES!



No point in continuing... Heading into this labyrinth without a guide would be suicidal...



THE NEXT MORNING, AFTER HOURS OF FRUITLESS SEARCH, THE INVESTIGATIVE TEAM IS READY TO LEAVE THE SCENE.

That's it, boss, we're done... Heading off to the lab now... What about you?

It doesn't make sense! If they wanted to kidnap the jeweller, why turn everything over like that?

They must have had a second objective...

I'll talk to Duranton; then I'll go grab a bite. If Bertrand needs me, tell him to call at Pierre's...

So, Doctor, how's Mr Duranton?

He's very shaken... I gave him a sedative; he must not be disturbed until tomorrow morning!

What!?! But what about my investigation!?

I mean it, Commissioner: no visits, no questioning. Is that clear? Good day, gentlemen!

He's a funny man, the doc! How am I supposed to work under these conditions? As for last night, so much for that little experiment of yours! What a mess! Olrik disappeared and Duranton out cold!!

... Besides, everything about this affair is ridiculous! Starting with Olrik, who's behaving like a lunatic, which isn't his type. Then the mishmash of botched kidnappings and avalanche of phone calls that mysteriously stopped as soon as the line was tapped... What's with you? Why are you squirming like that!?

Er... Precisely about that telephone...

GRABBING A CHAIR, BLAKE GOES TO THE WALL...

I just had an inspiration...

Right! What now?!

HE FEELS AROUND THE TELEPHONE BELL FOR A WHILE, THEN...

That's what I thought!

Look at this, Pradier...

A piece of cloth!?

Stuck between the bell and the hammer!

And that's why your telephone is silent!

Dammit! If I ever get my hands on the guy who...

Shh! Now that it's free to ring again, let's go get some breakfast! And wait for further events...

... Which, if I'm not mistaken, should unfold soon.

Hmm... Fine...

HALF AN HOUR LATER, IN THE ROOM WHERE DURANTON LIES SUPINE...

Sir can rest easy: I checked everything... The basement is permanently blocked and all the gentlemen have left the house, except of course the agents on guard duty outside...

At last!! I'll be able to...

BUT AT THAT INSTANT...

DRRING

AH!

DURANTON HAS SAT UP ABRUPTLY, TERRIFIED...



NO!!! GET OUT!!!
GET OUT NOW!!!

Yes... Yes, Sir...



WHILE IN THE HALL THE BELL RINGS FURIOUSLY, DURANTON, AS IF IN A TRANCE, EXTENDS HIS HAND TOWARDS THE TELEPHONE...



HELLO?

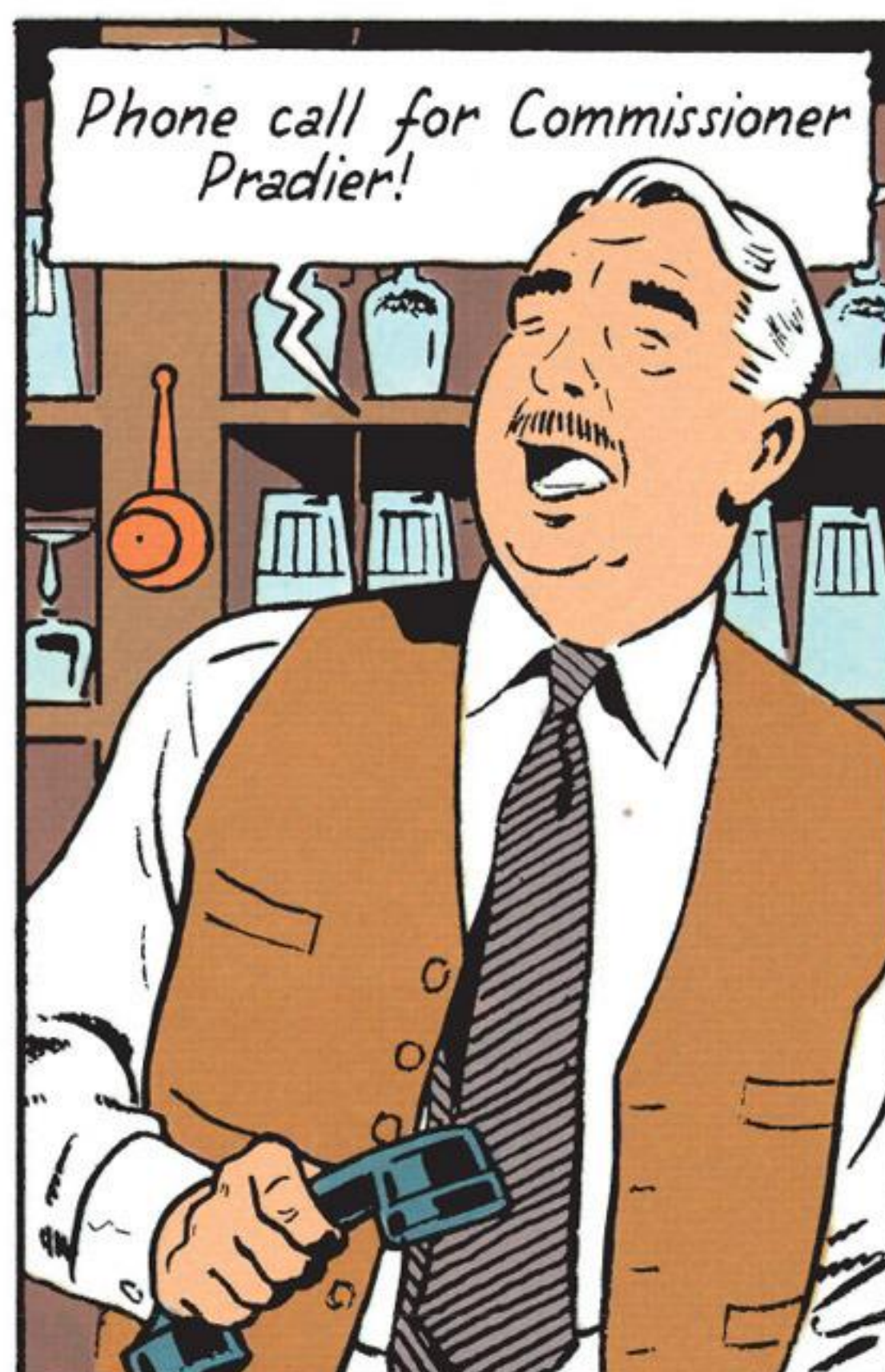


MEANWHILE, IN THE CAFÉ WHERE OUR FRIENDS ARE FINISHING THEIR BREAKFAST...

Ah! I feel better already! This damned case had me depressed...



Phone call for Commissioner Pradier!



What!? OK, I'll be right there!



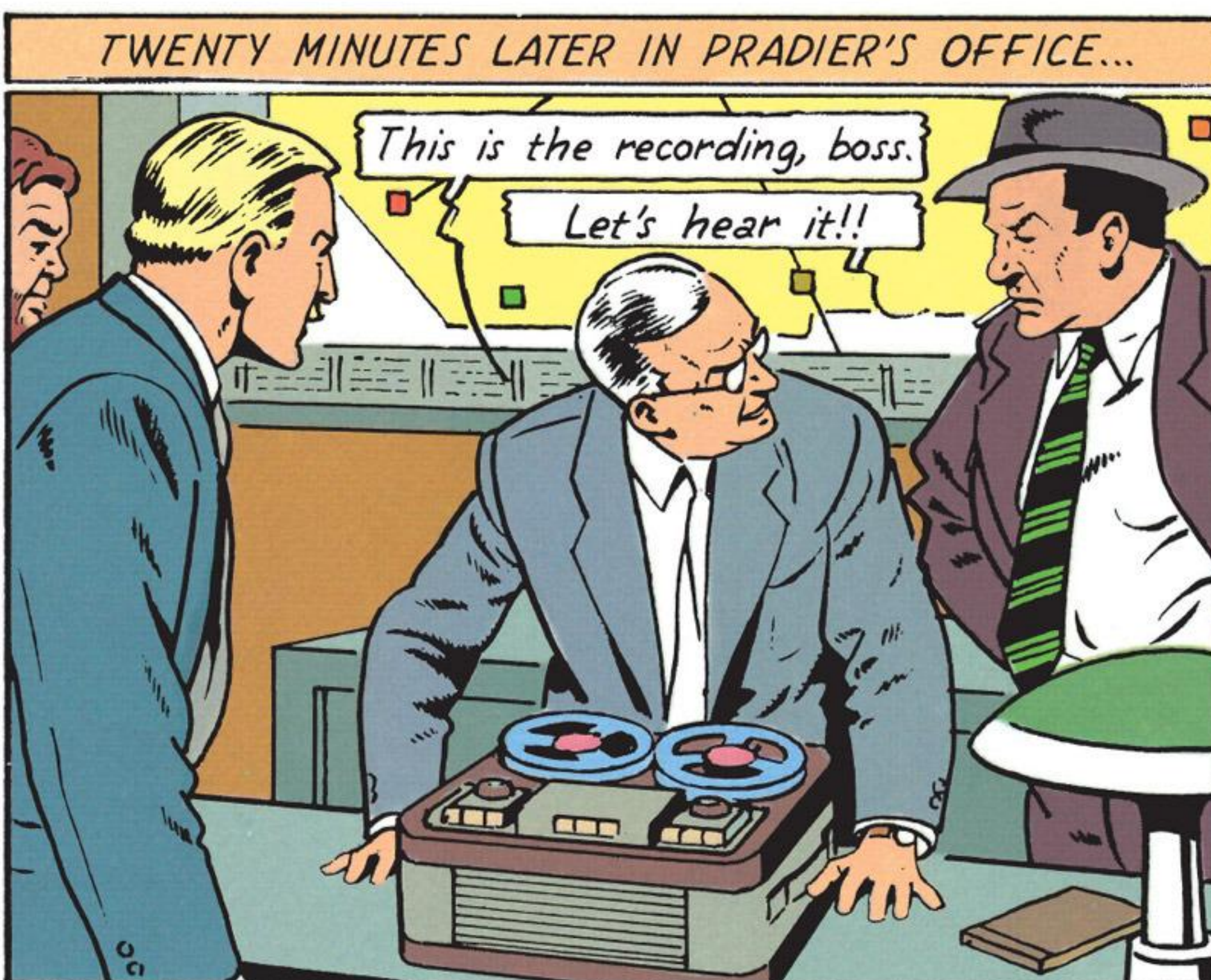
This is it! The wiretap has just intercepted a communication with the Durantont residence!

Well! That didn't take long!



TWENTY MINUTES LATER IN PRADIER'S OFFICE...

This is the recording, boss.
Let's hear it!!



AND PRADIER PROMPTLY PUSHES THE PLAY BUTTON...

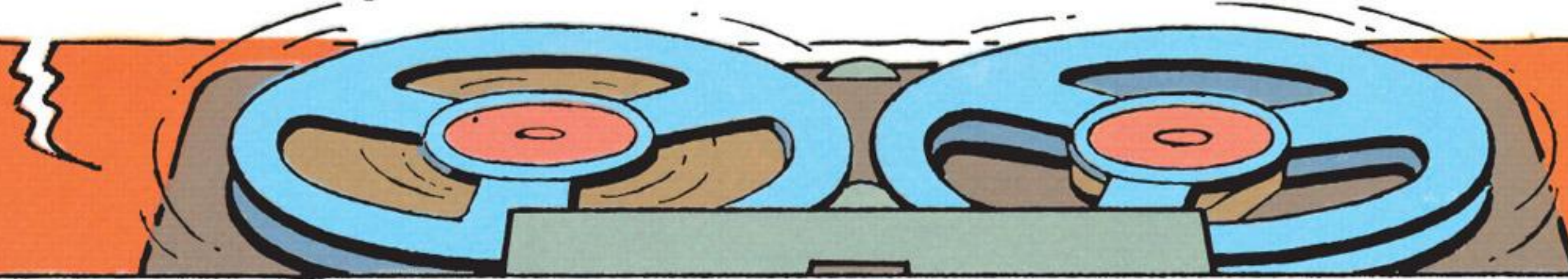


... Hello!?!... Ha! Ha! You've finally decided to answer, you old rascal! But no more games, let's get things straight once and for all! Please! If somebody were to hear you?!
Silence! So, Mr Durantont, respectable jeweller, is on the verge of bankruptcy when the restoration of the Queen's necklace miraculously gets him back into funds... But that's not enough for him, and he gets the idea to take possession of this lovely trinket. He gets in touch with my lieutenant, Sharkey, who quickly lets me know from outside La Santé. In exchange for the financing of my escape, I offer an amusing little scheme, the trick of which is to have the stones vanish under the pretence of an accidental collapse. The spoils will be shared fifty-fifty... It's a deal! Because it is important that the honourable Mr Durantont be above any suspicion, I will operate the very night of the official reception! But there's a snag: Mr Durantont has replaced the necklace with a worthless glass copy! And here I am—I, Olrik—crossed by a square!!! Ha! Ha! Ha! It's really very funny!

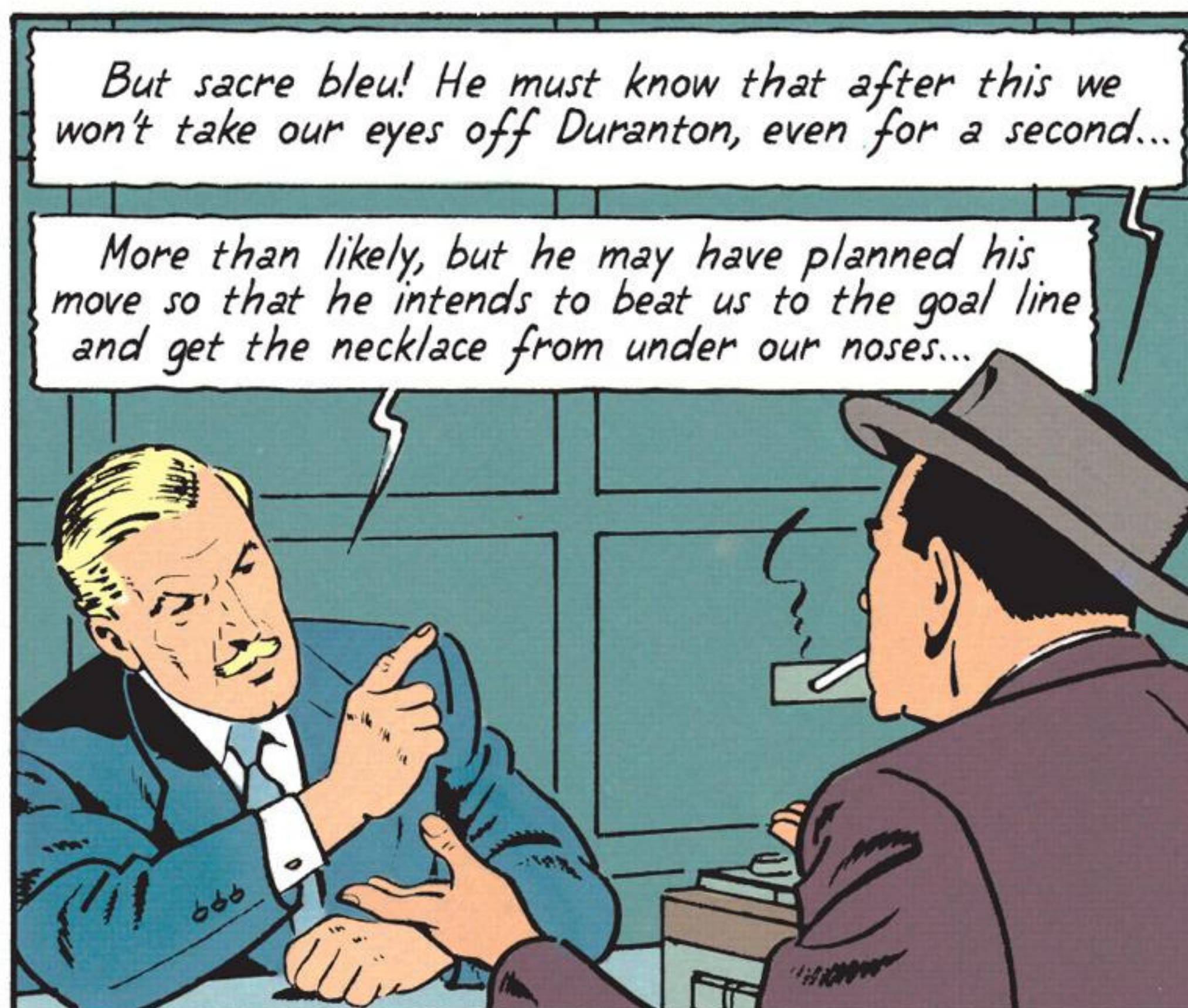
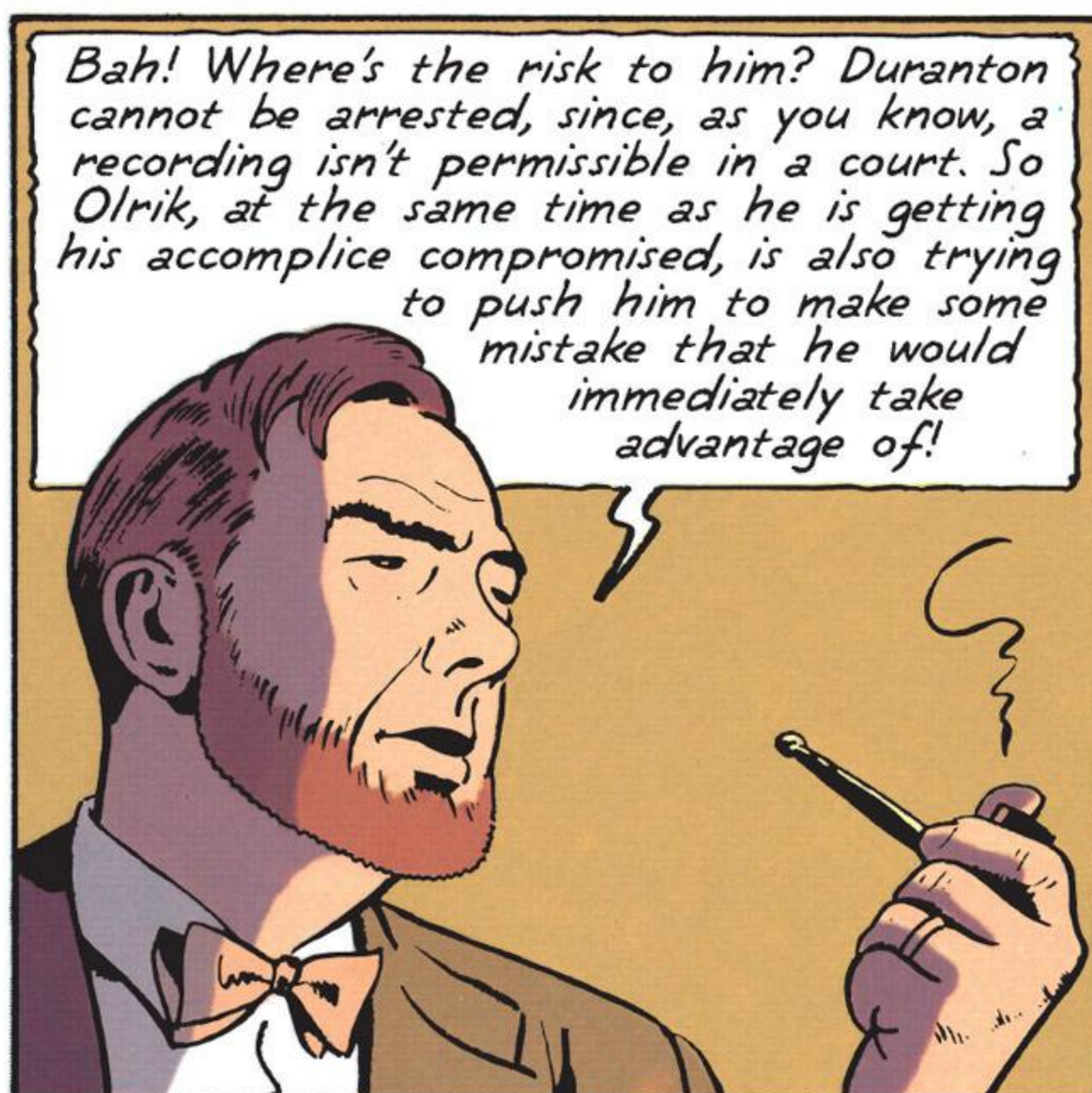
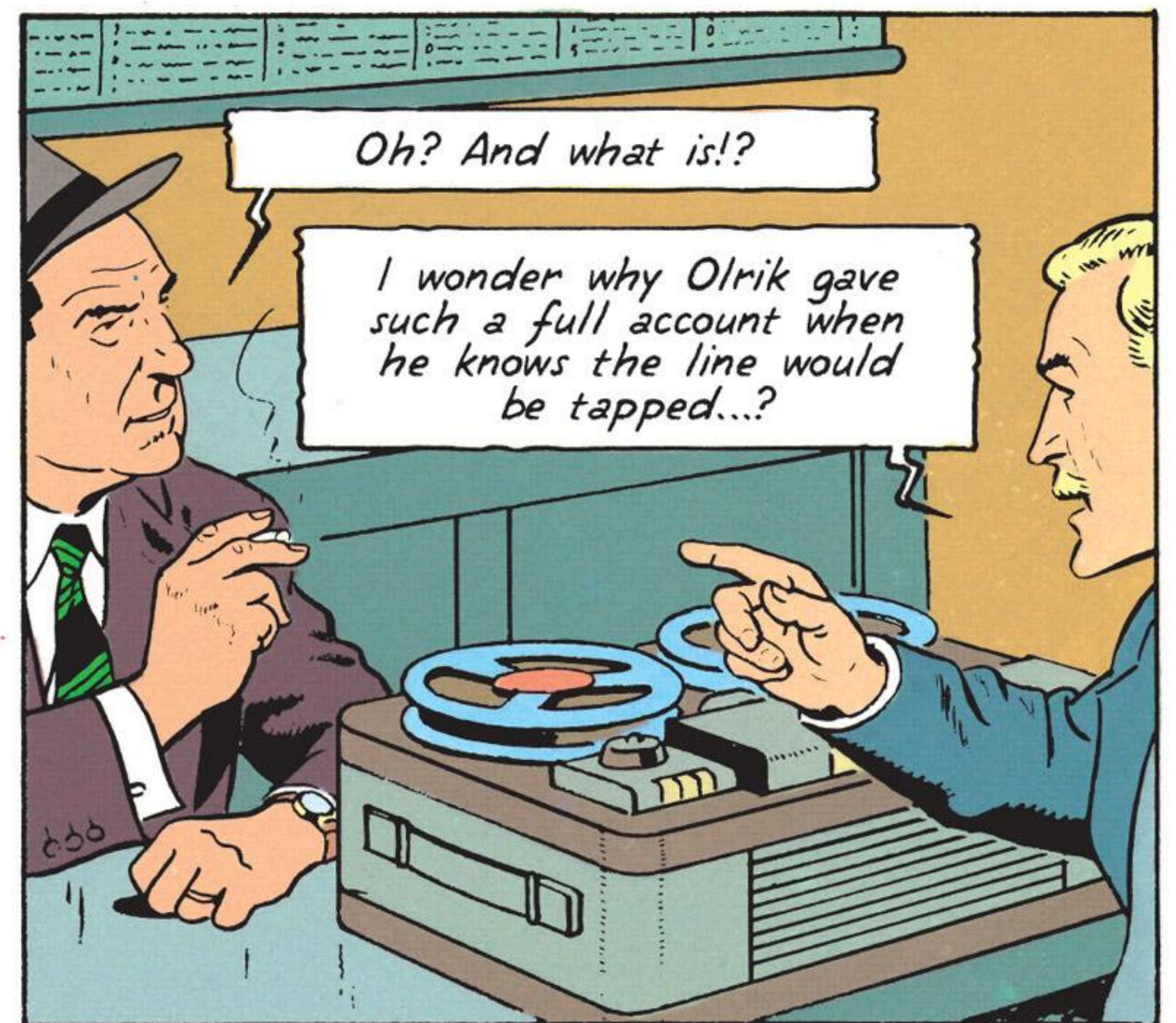
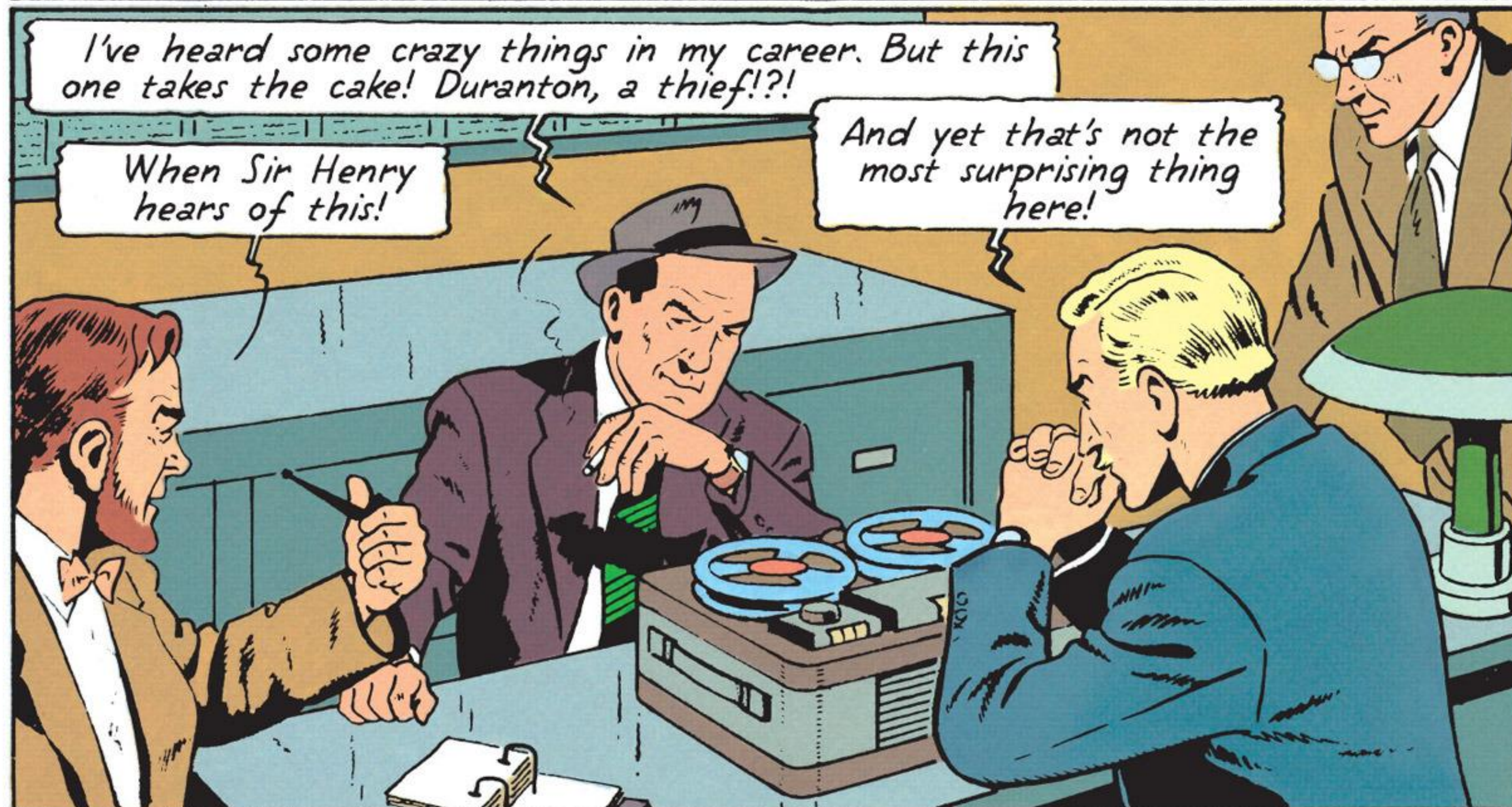


AT THAT POINT, DURANTON DESPERATELY TRIES TO INTERRUPT HIS IMPLACABLE CORRESPONDENT...

... Let me explain... Don't bother! So, then, once I discover the deception, I immediately decide to change the plan. I take the fake necklace with me, but I leave in plain view the case with a short note inside, sufficiently strange to bait my old friends Blake and Mortimer. Finally, just in case you might manage to hide said note, and also to make you understand that I will stay on your trail, I call the press and begin operation "telephone"... Up until now, you've succeeded in evading me, thanks to Blake and Mortimer. But that can't last forever... Besides, the police are already starting to suspect you... You're trapped, old fellow! Ha! Ha! Being of merciful character, though, I'll give you one last chance. Be at Montsouris Park tonight at 10... Someone will give you further directions when the time comes... and of course, don't forget to bring the goods with you!... But what will I have left?!... Your life, Mr Durantont!



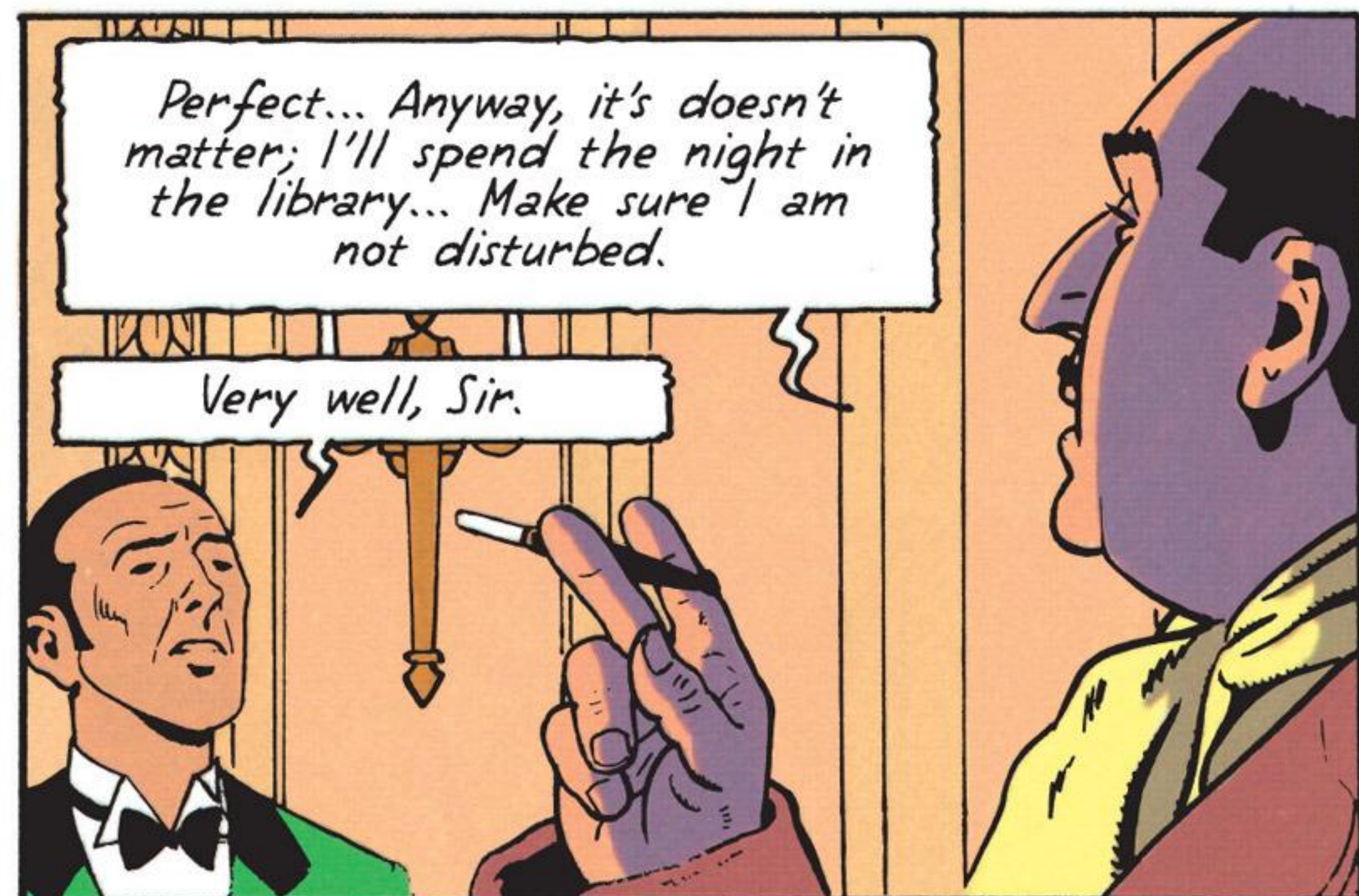
A HEAVY SILENCE FOLLOWS THE END OF THE STARTLING RECORDING... THEN...



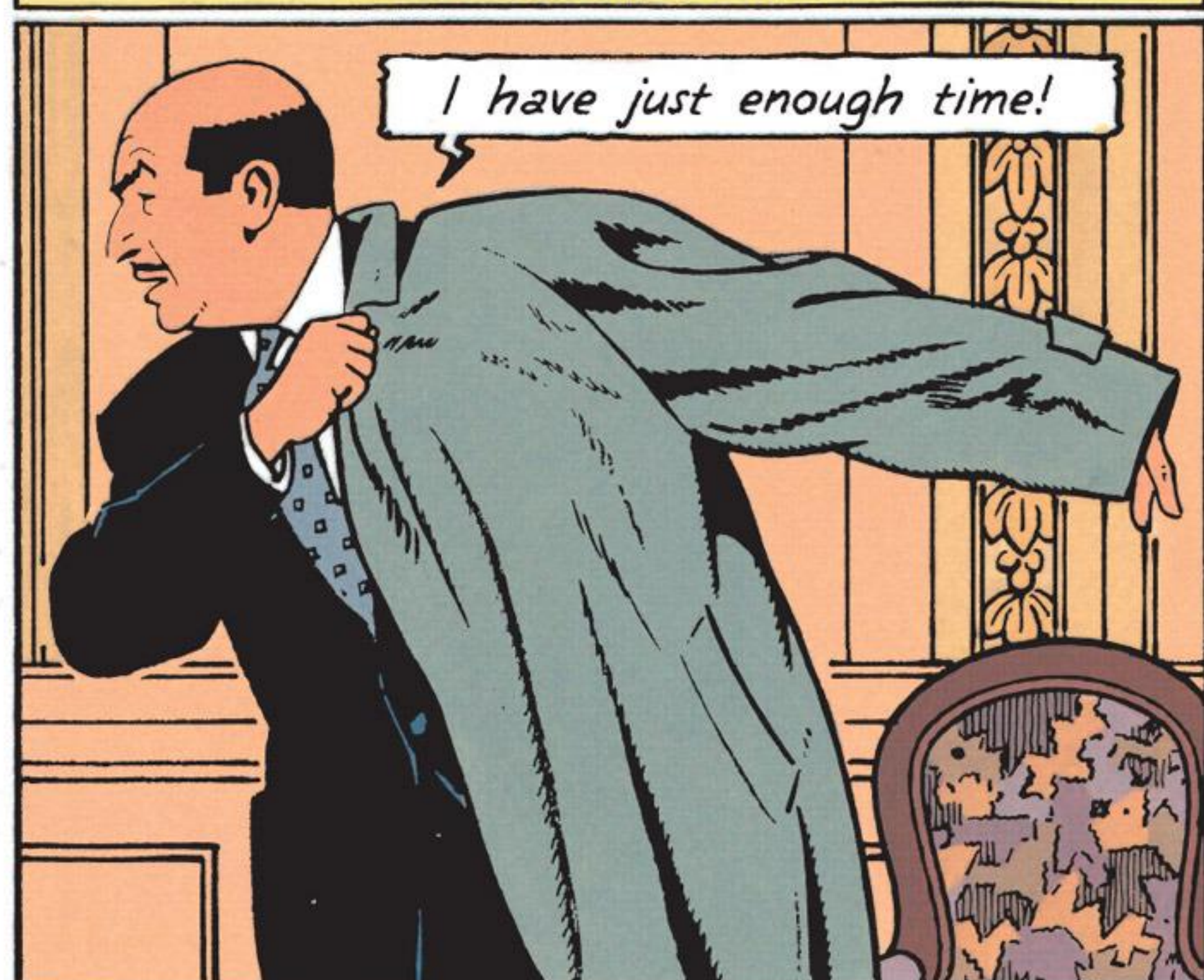
DURANTON, WHO IS WATCHING THEM THOUGHTFULLY FROM HIS WINDOW, STARTS SUDDENLY AS THE CLOCK CHIMES HALF PAST NINE...



Er... See here, Vincent... I see that it's raining hard. Why don't you let those two policemen on guard in and take them to the kitchen for refreshments. They'll be as useful there as outside...



THE DOOR CLOSED, DURANTON SWIFTLY REMOVES HIS ROBE, PUTS ON A JACKET AND A RAINCOAT...



... GRABS A FEW DOCUMENTS THAT HE SHOVES INTO A BAG...



... THEN GOES DOWN THE MAIN STAIRS...



MOMENTS LATER, THE JEWELLER SLIPS INSIDE THE LIBRARY AND CAREFULLY CLOSES THE DOOR BEHIND HIMSELF...



... TAKES A STEPLADDER...



... AND POSITIONS IT RIGHT IN THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM...



THAT DONE, HE CLIMBS UP TO THE CHANDELIER...



... RUMMAGES BRIEFLY THROUGH THE GLEAMING CRYSTAL PENDANTS...



... AND PULLS OUT FROM THIS SIMPLE AND UNDETECTABLE HIDING PLACE THE WONDERFUL NECKLACE OF QUEEN MARIE ANTOINETTE, GLITTERING LIKE A THOUSAND STARS!



Such splendour!! And I should give it to that ruffian!?!

BUT THE SOUND OF VOICES MAKES HIM COME DOWN FROM HIS PERCH IN A HURRY...



This way, gentlemen...

Mr Durantont is really very kind...



Vincent and the policemen! The path is clear!!

RELIEVED, DURANTONT DEPOSITS THE FABULOUS TREASURE IN THE BAG...



... AND SLIPS INTO THE HALL...



Now!!!

... HE GOES TO THE DOOR...



... CROSSES THE COURTYARD...

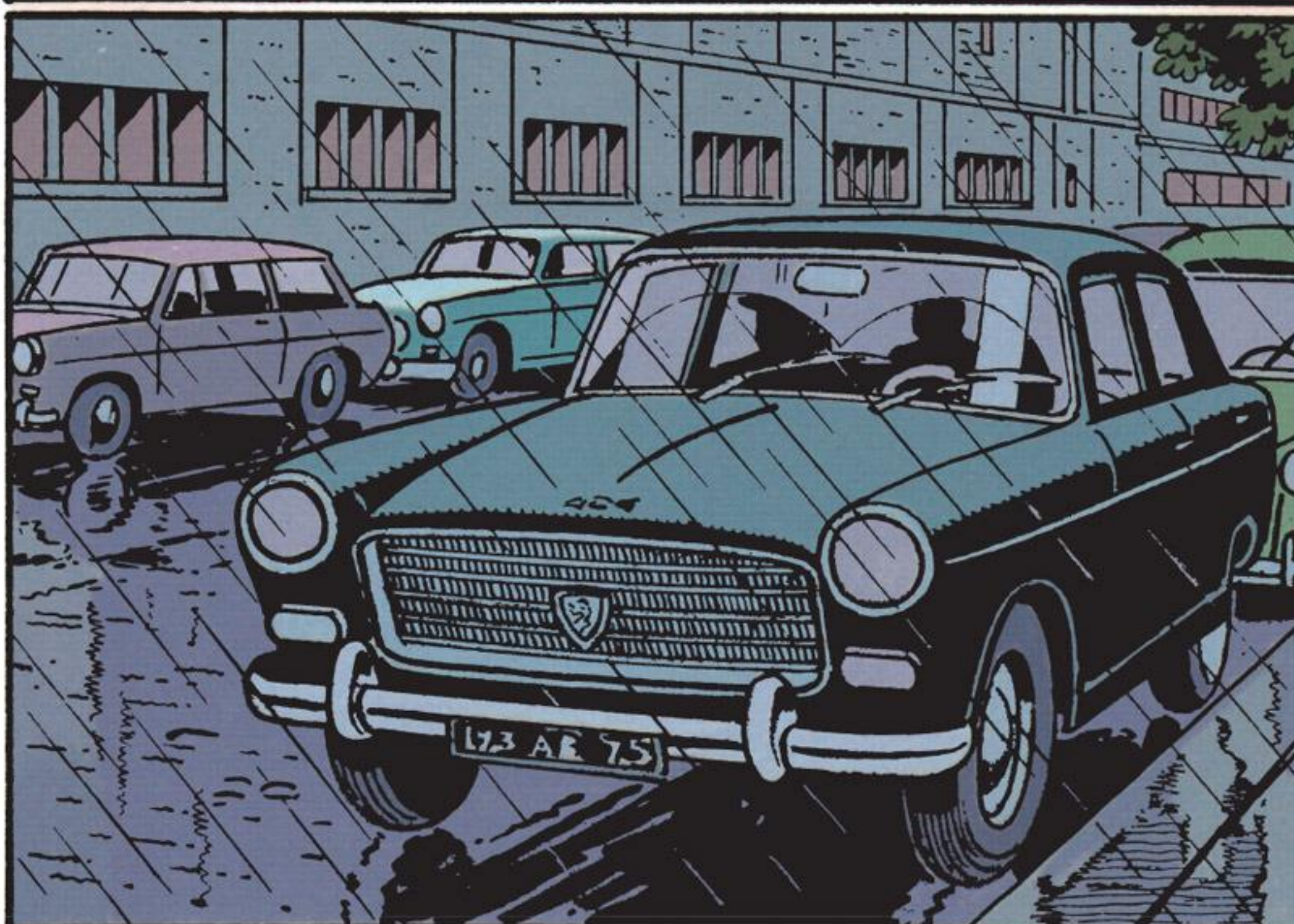


... AND, HEADING ALONG THE GARDEN, REACHES THE GATE TO BERTON STREET WITHOUT A HITCH...



At last! What a relief!!

BUT DURANTONT HAS NO IDEA THAT FROM INSIDE A BLACK PEUGEOT WAITING WITH ITS LIGHTS OFF, FOUR MEN ARE WATCHING THE EXIT...



THERE HE IS!!!



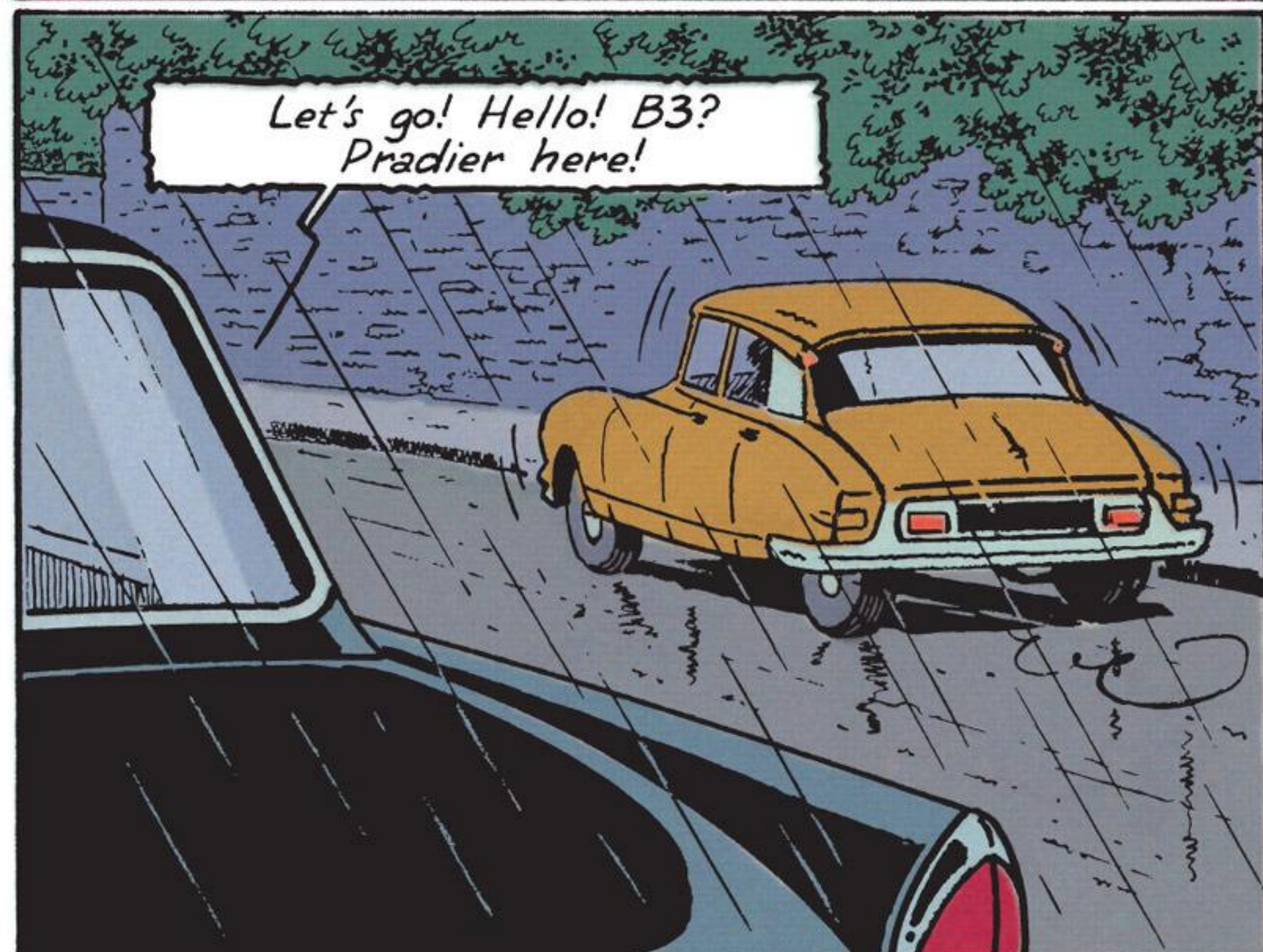
INDEED, DURANTON HAS JUST APPEARED AT THE CORNER OF PROUST STREET...



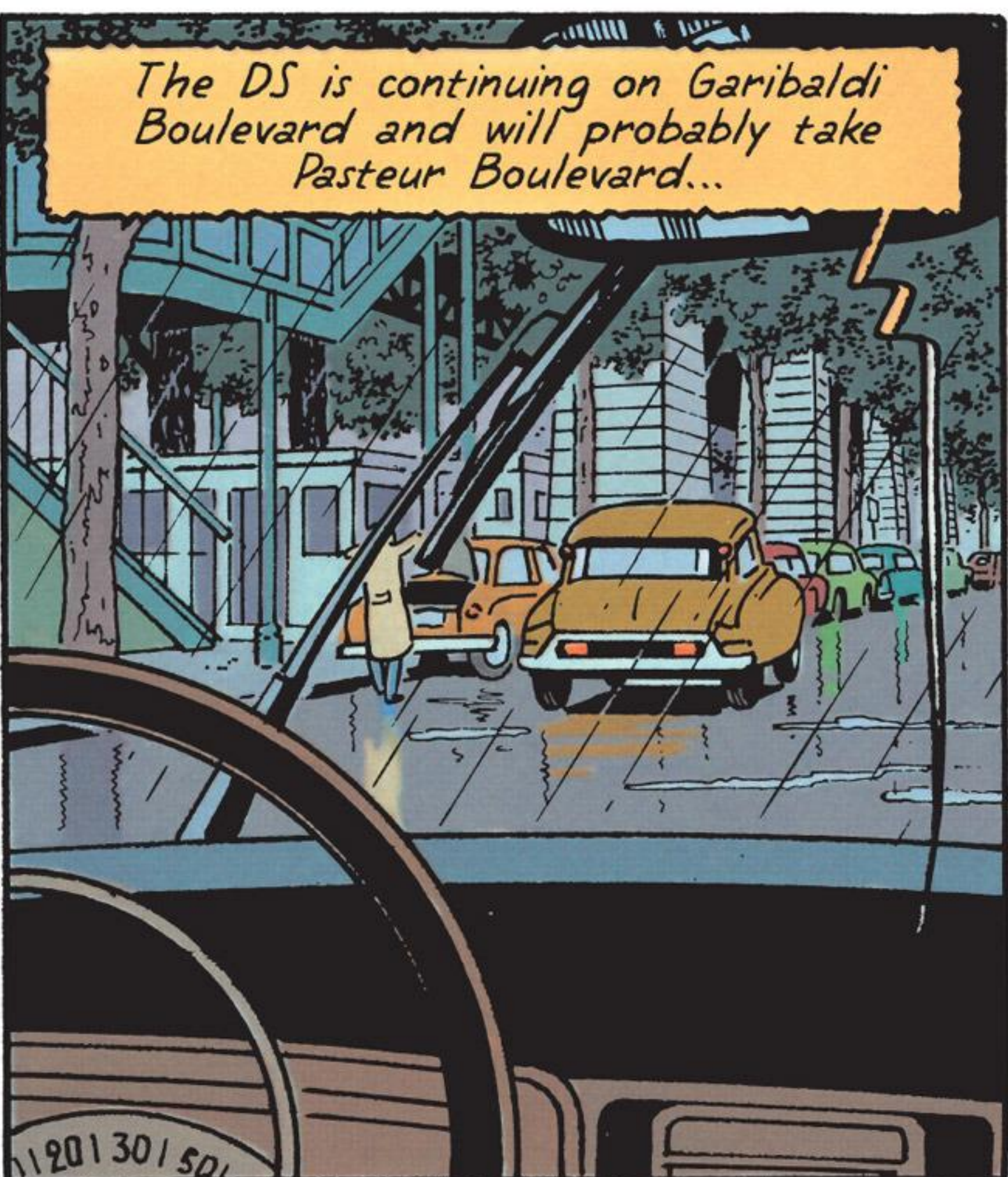
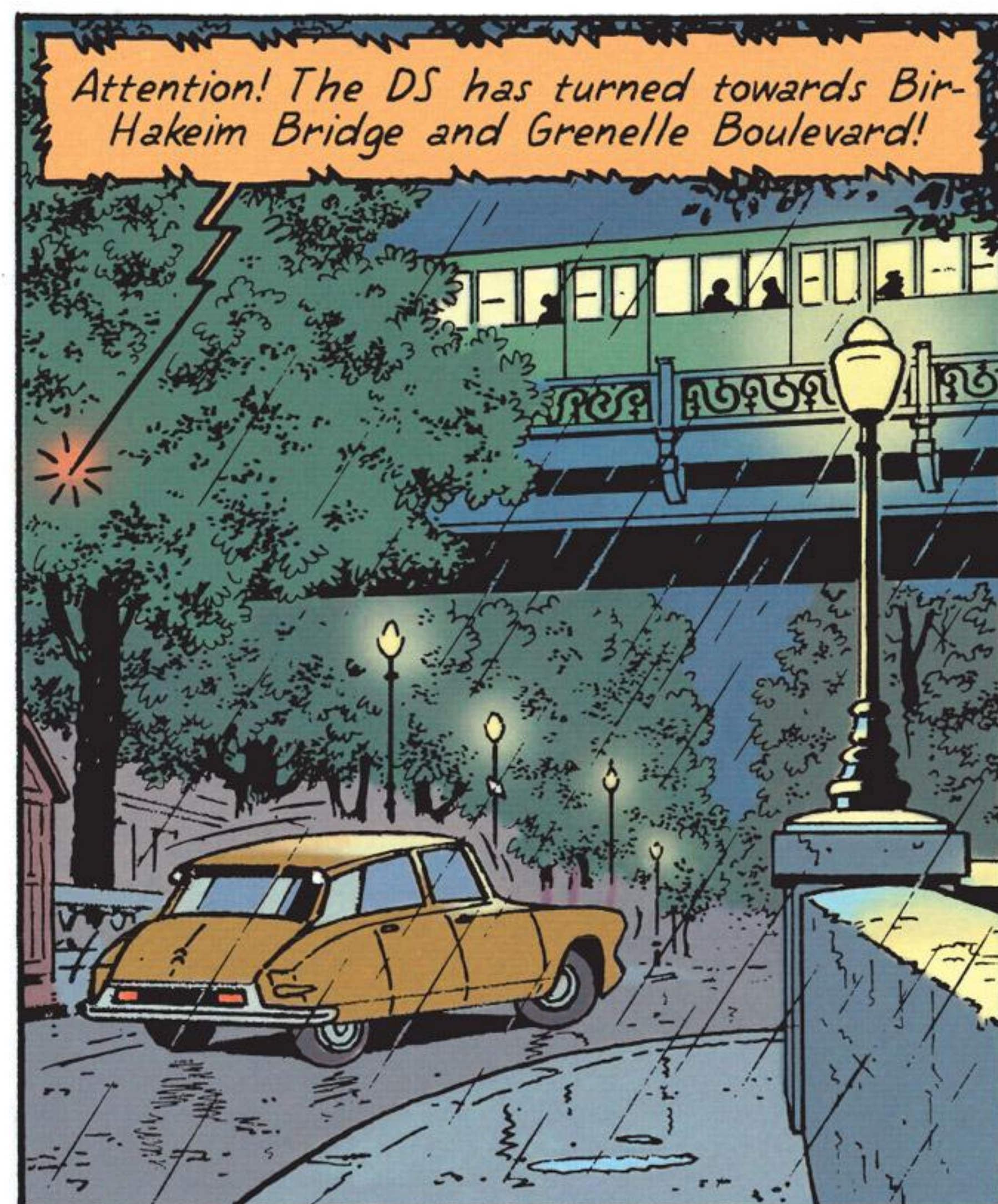
A FEW STEPS FURTHER HE REACHES HIS CAR...



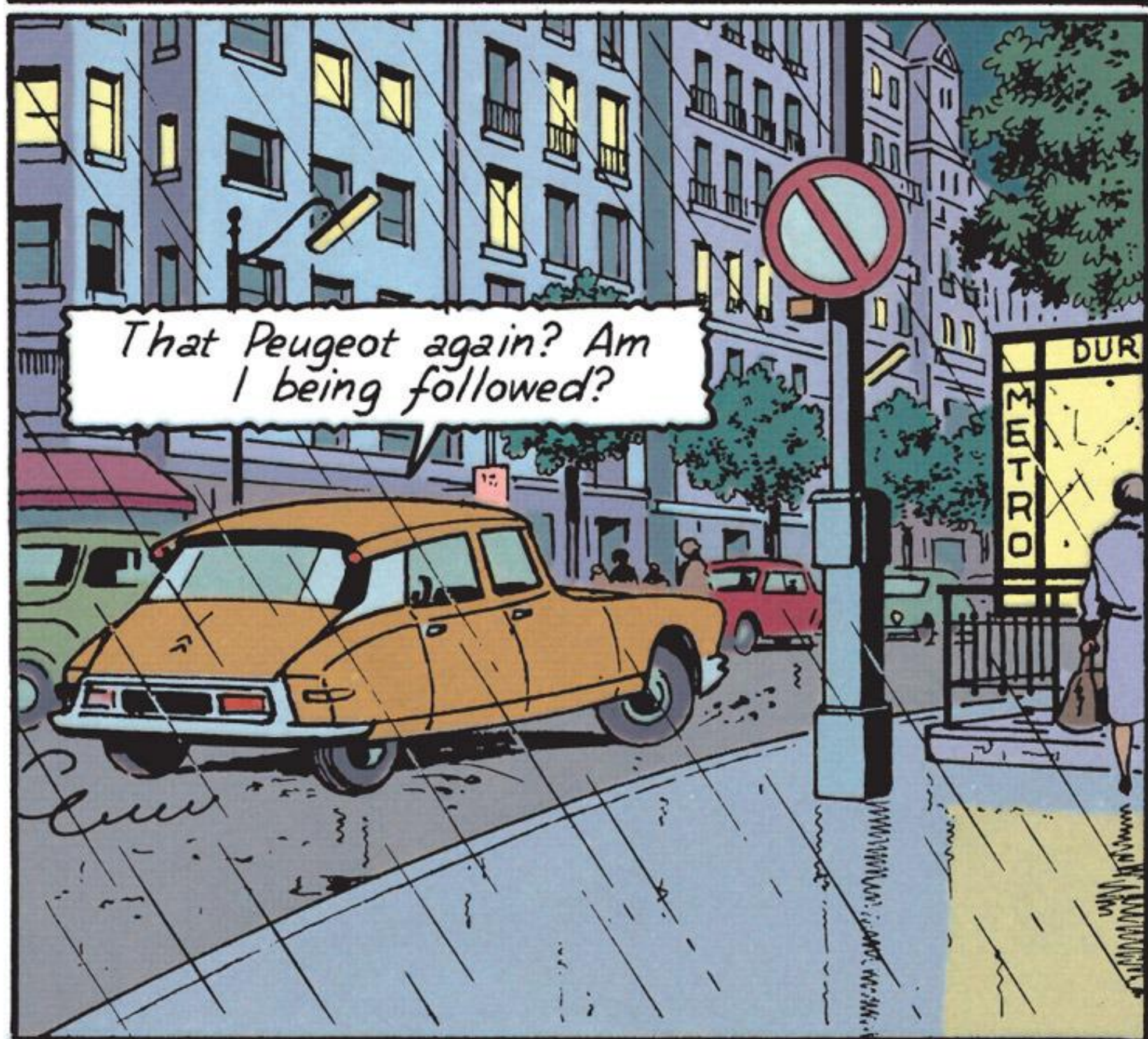
AND IMMEDIATELY DRIVES OFF...



... FOLLOWED BY THE BLACK 404.



HOWEVER, THE JEWELLER HAS JUST NOTICED THE CAR FOLLOWING HIM...



Hello! Duranton is going up Montparnasse Boulevard... B3, you're on. Get ahead of us or he might make us... Over!



B3, FOLLOWING PRADIER'S ORDER, OVERTAKES HIS CAR AND TAKES THE LEAD IN THE TRAILING...



Why on earth is he going to Montsouris by this roundabout way?

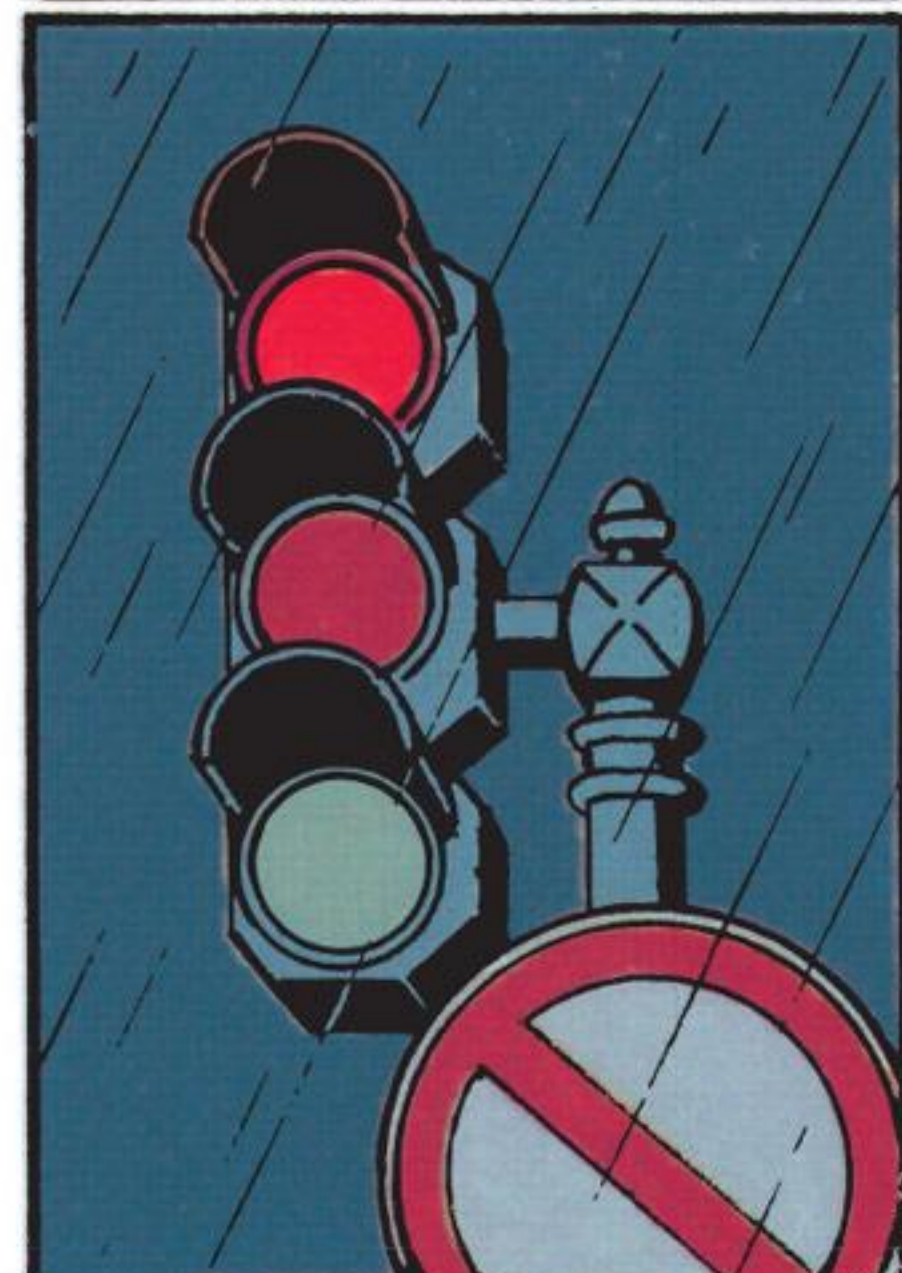
Say, Pradier, doesn't that ring a bell? Montparnasse Boulevard, Port Royal, Les Gobelins, Gate of Italy...?



By golly! That's the way to Orly!! The bird is trying to fly the coop... Gun it, Bernard!



BUT JUST THEN...



BERNARD BRAKES, BUT THE STREET IS SLIPPERY, AND...



COLLISION! FOLLOWED BY THE INEVITABLE TRAFFIC JAM...



WHILE THE POLICEMAN COMPLIES, A MESSAGE FROM B3 ARRIVES.

Hello! This is B3! The DS has just swerved violently... It seems to be hesitating... Oh! It's off again and... DAMN!!!



Duranton has just turned hard into Raspail Boulevard! Too late for us! I'll...



BUT PRADIER IS ALREADY CALLING ANOTHER CAR...

Hello! T4! Our man is flying down Raspail Boulevard! Something must have happened! Try to catch up with him via Edgar Quinet Boulevard!! Over!



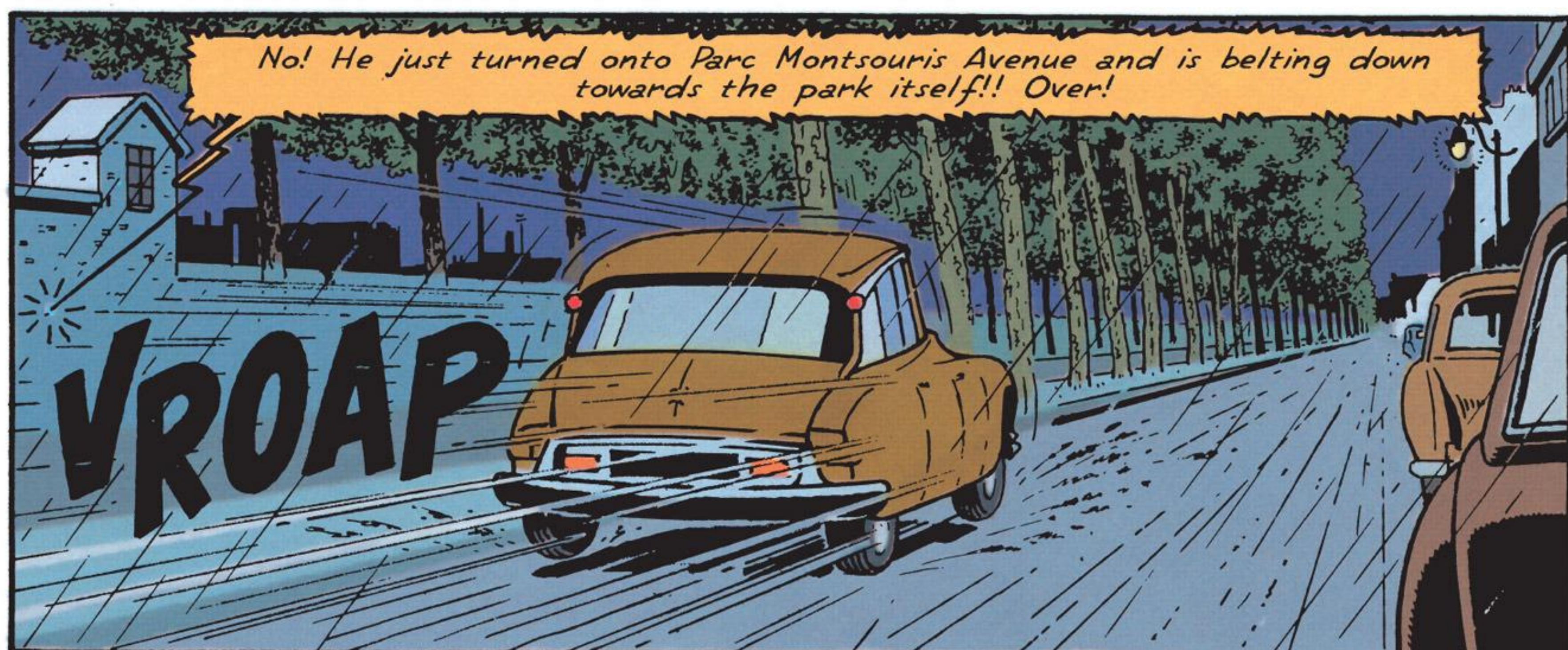
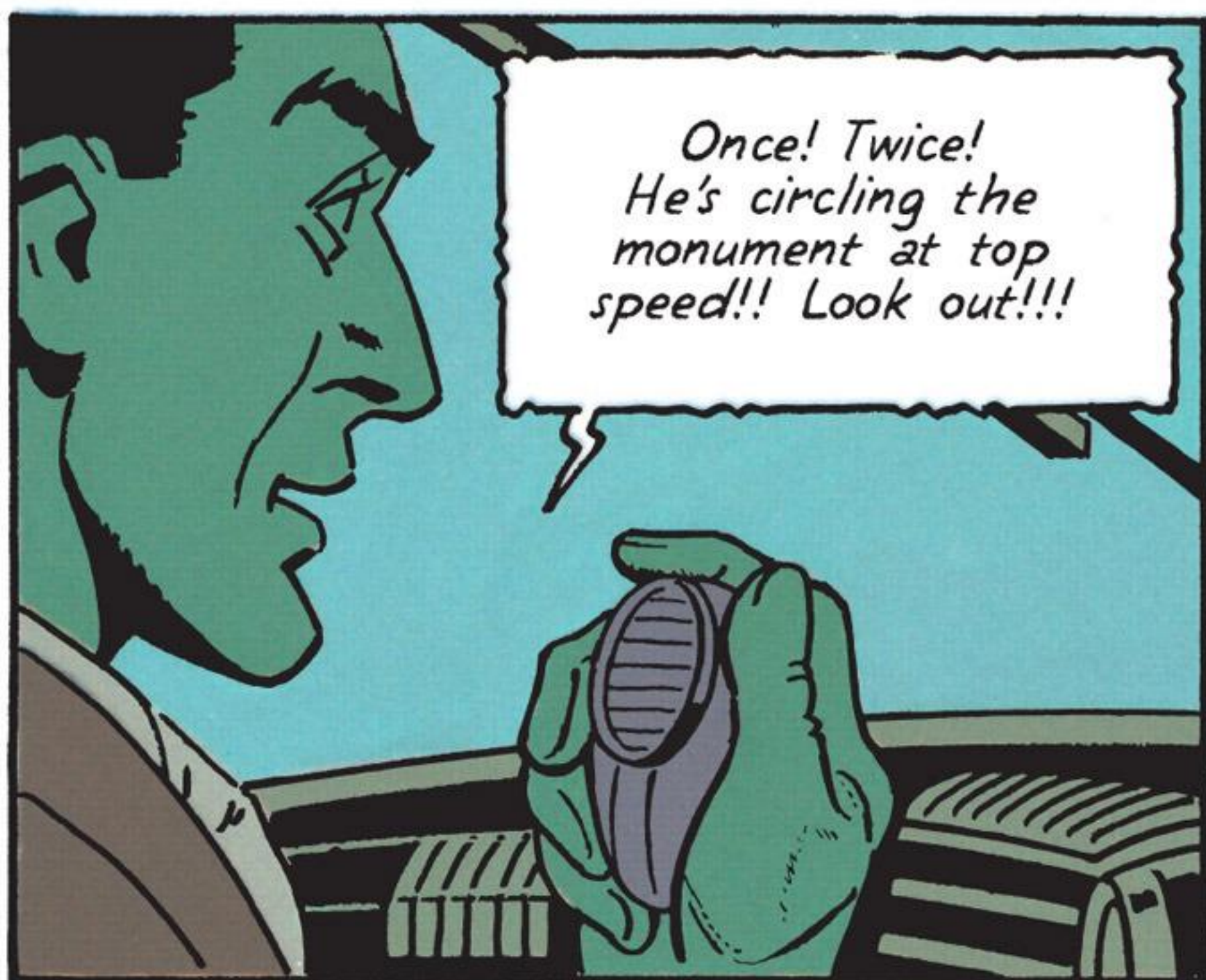
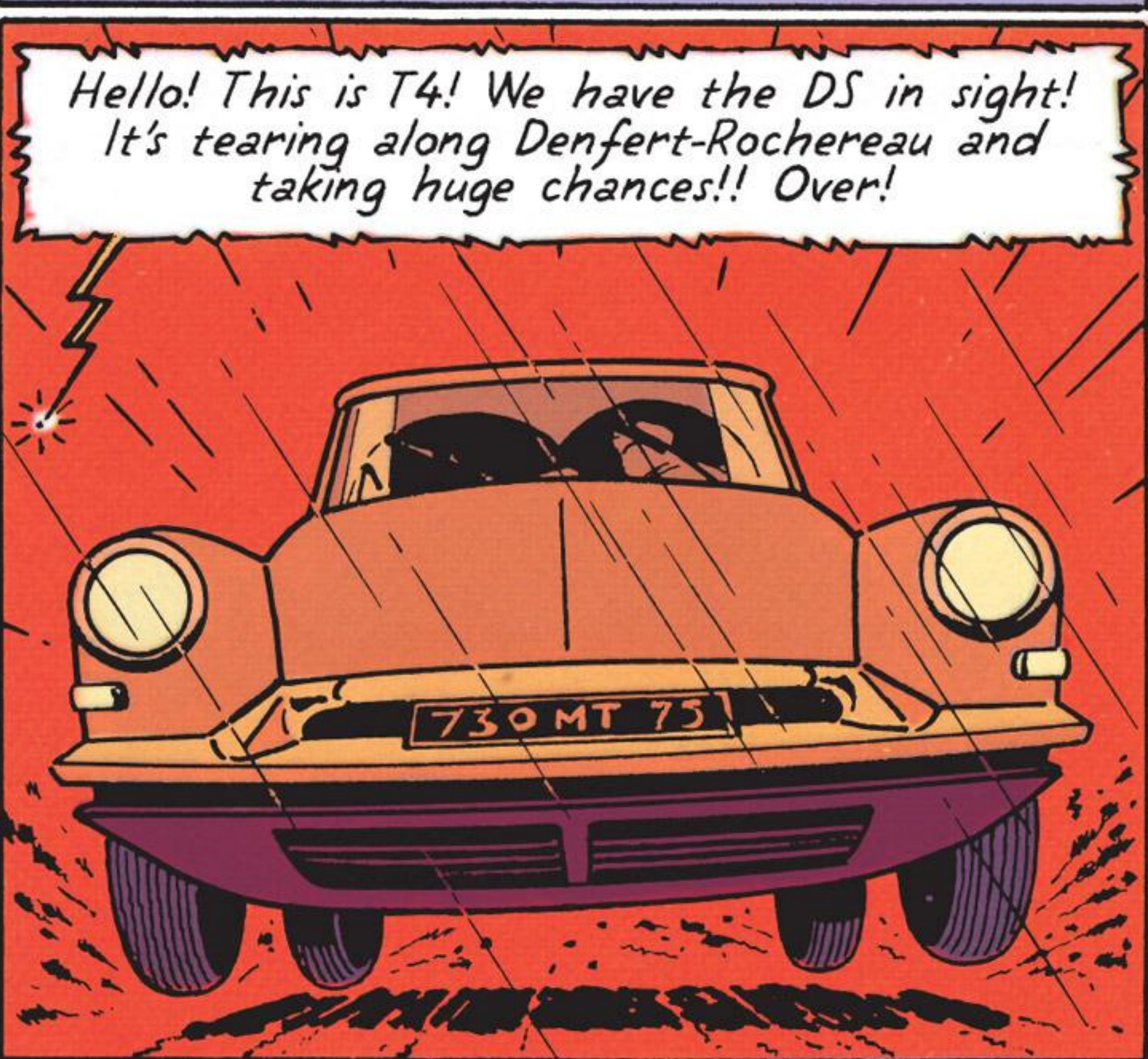
SOMETHING IS, INDEED, HAPPENING ONBOARD THE DS, WHERE DURANTON HAS FROZEN IN SHOCK. SHARKEY HAS JUST SUDDENLY REARED UP BEHIND HIM AND...



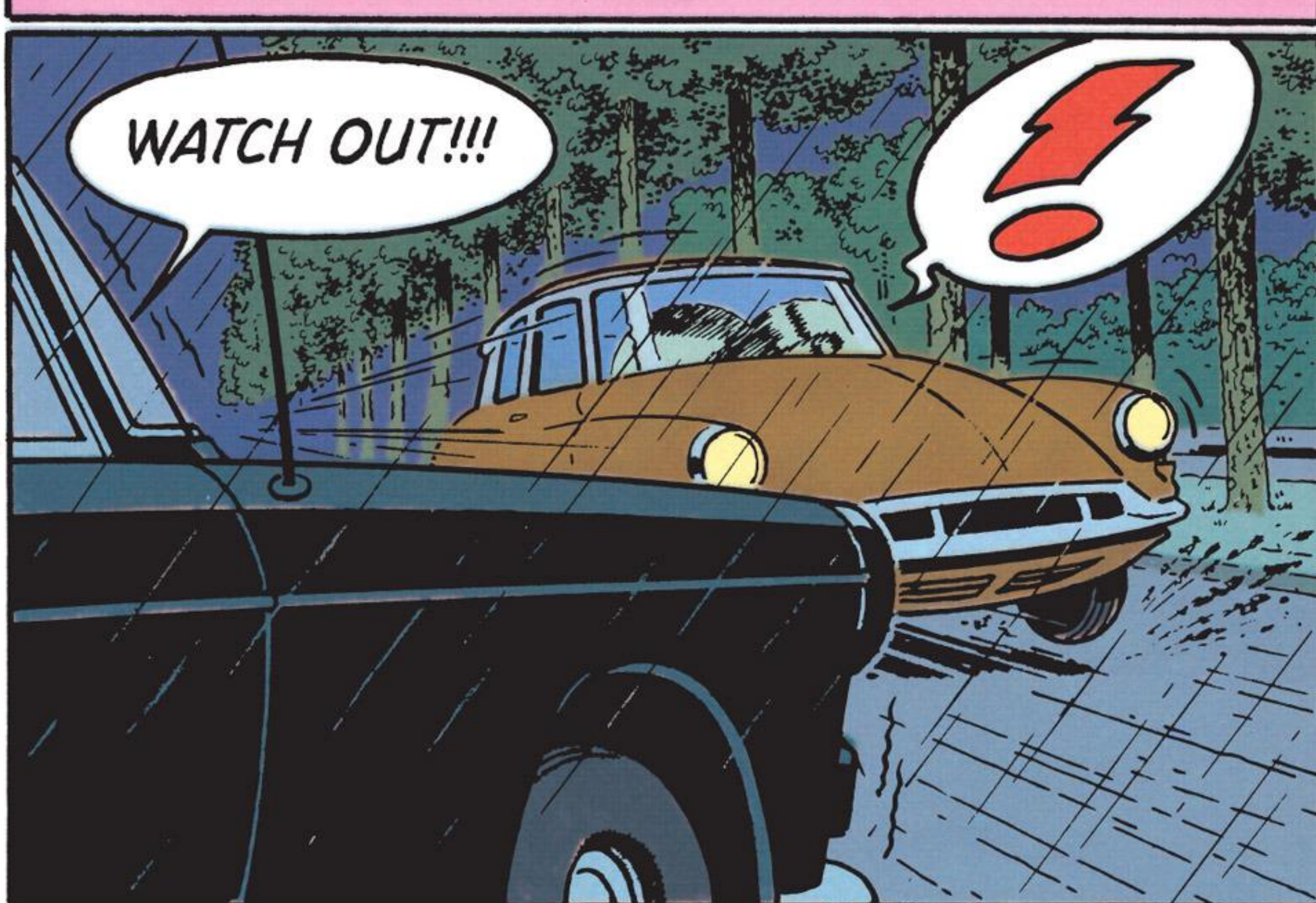
MEANWHILE, ON HOT COALS, PRADIER IS FINALLY FREE TO CONTINUE...



AT THAT MOMENT, A CALL FROM T4 ARRIVES...



TEN SECONDS LATER, JUST AS THE 404 EXITS ONTO PARC MONTSOURIS AVENUE, THE SPEEDING DS APPEARS SUDDENLY TO ITS LEFT!



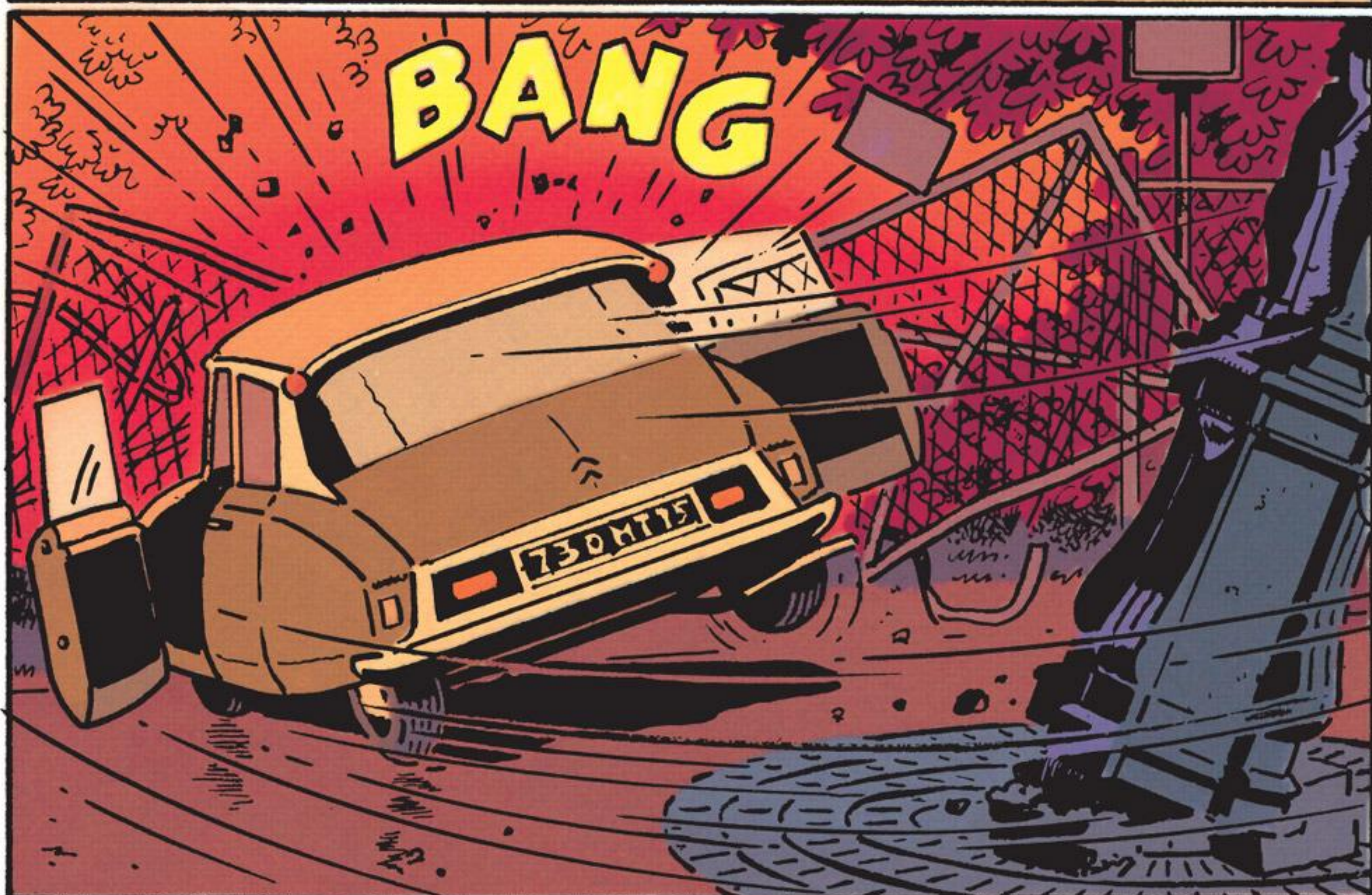
PANICKED, DURANTON SWERVES BRUTALLY, BUT THE WHEELS LOCK AND SKID, AND...!!



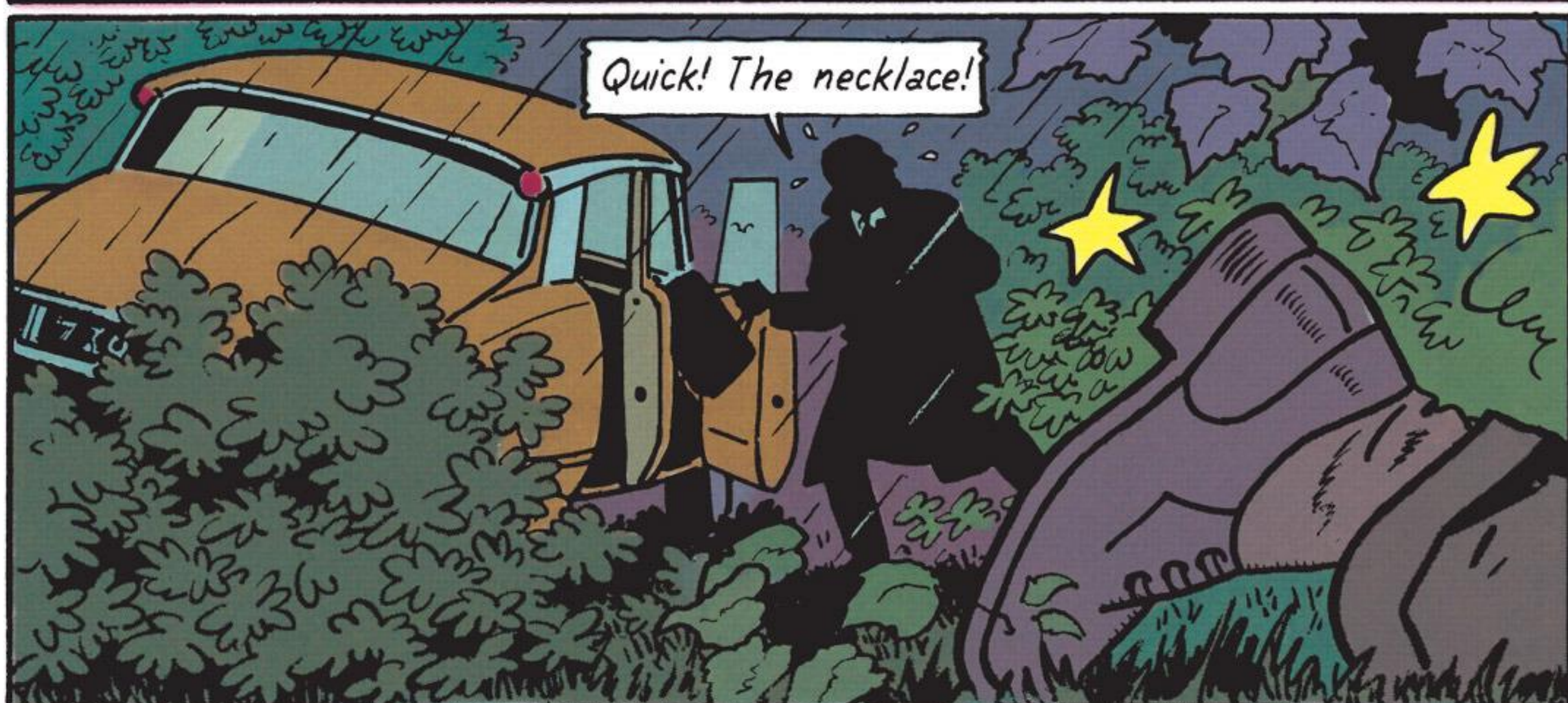
OUT OF CONTROL, THE DS STARTS ZIGZAGGING MADLY, MISSES ITS TURN, SPINS AROUND...



... AND, AFTER SENDING A WALLACE FOUNTAIN TUMBLING DOWN, RAMS INTO THE PARK'S FENCE AND DISAPPEARS IN THE BUSHES!



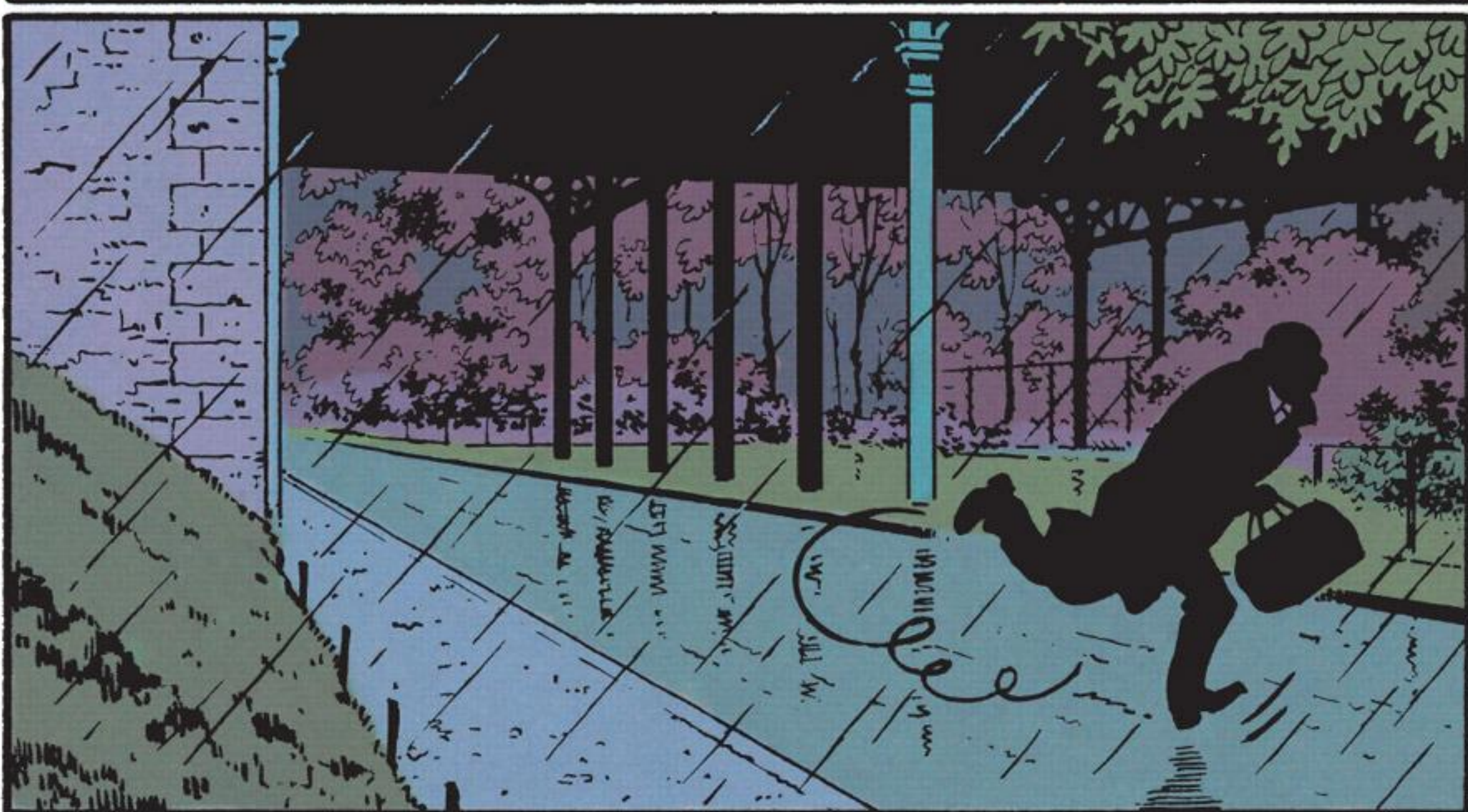
DURANTON, WHO HAD BEEN CLINGING TO THE STEERING WHEEL, IS UNHURT, WHILE SHARKEY HAS BEEN THROWN OUT OF THE CAR AND IS LYING UNCONSCIOUS UNDER THE FOLIAGE...



THE JEWELLER WANTS TO RUN OUT OF THE PARK, BUT FROM EVERY SIDE HE SEES POLICE CARS CONVERGING TOWARDS HIM!!!



WITHOUT THINKING, HE DIVES BACK INTO THE DARKNESS AND TAKES OFF DOWN THE NEAREST LANE!



MEANWHILE, WHILE PRADIER IS SOUNDING THE ALARM, BLAKE AND MORTIMER HAVE RUSHED TO THE CRASHED CAR...



Surround the park! The man is fleeing towards Reille Street! Stop any person or vehicle moving through that sector... Over!



SWARMING IN THROUGH EVERY ENTRANCE, THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY START THEIR SEARCH...



... TERRIFYING DURANTON, WHO, NOT KNOWING ABOUT COMMISSIONER PRADIER'S PLANS, DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THIS SUDDEN DEPLOYMENT OF FORCES!



AFTER THE FIRST WAVE HAS PASSED, THE TERRIFIED FUGITIVE DESPERATELY LOOKS FOR A PLACE TO HIDE THE INCRIMINATING TREASURE...

I simply must get rid of this accursed necklace!!



BUT HE BARELY HAS TIME TO THROW HIMSELF FLAT ON THE GROUND, FOR A NEW GROUP OF POLICEMEN HAS JUST ARRIVED THROUGH A SMALL GATE...

You three, search the café! We'll do the merry-go-round and the area around the lake... Got it?

Got it!



UNAWARE THAT THEIR QUARRY IS CLOSE AT HAND, THE TWO MEN APPROACH THE MERRY-GO-ROUND...

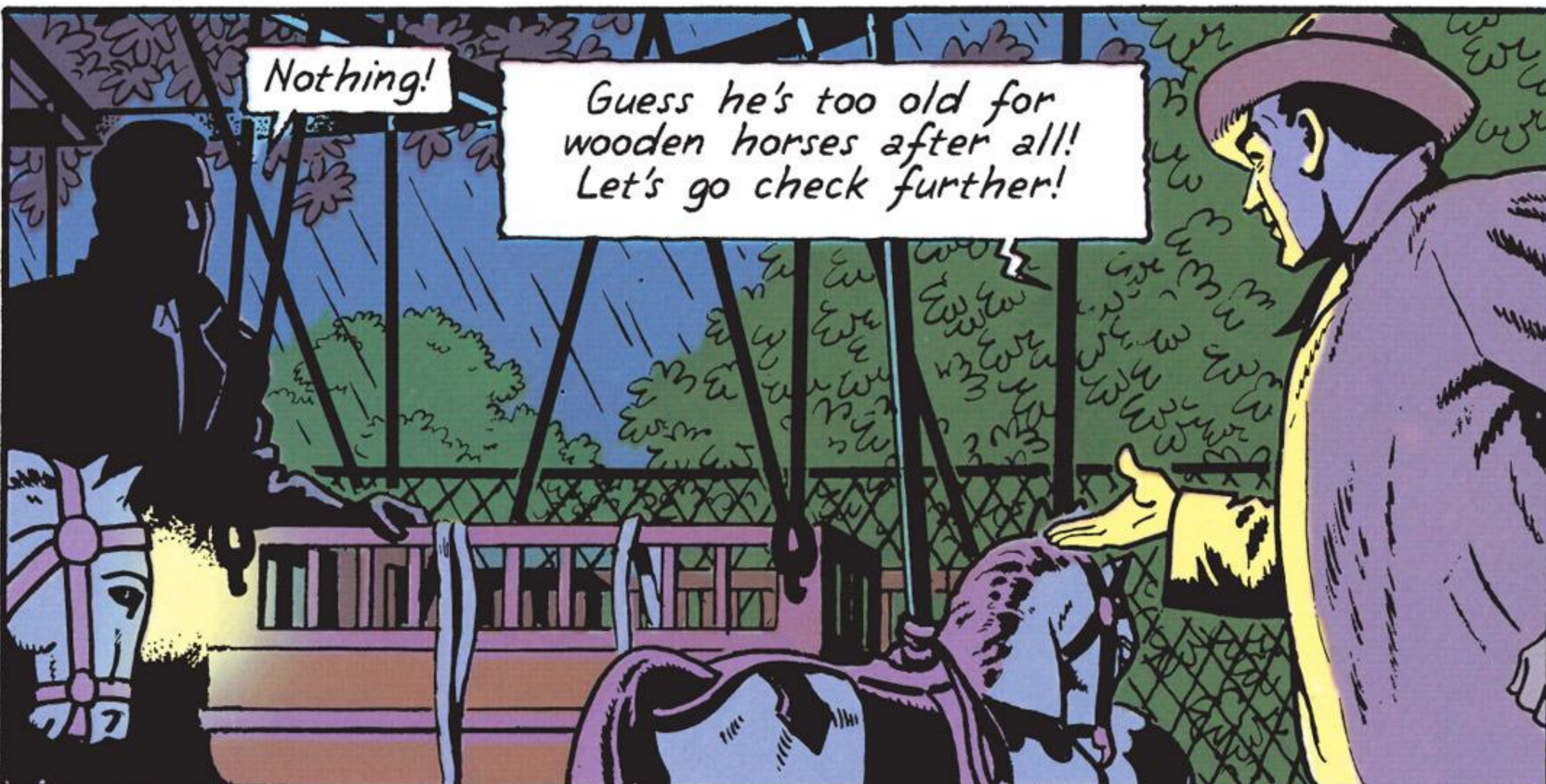
Oh, the enclosure isn't locked?

Watch out! There's nothing more dangerous than an enraged sheep!!



Nothing!

Guess he's too old for wooden horses after all! Let's go check further!



ONCE THE POLICEMEN HAVE MOVED ON, THE JEWELLER RISES AND CAREFULLY APPROACHES THE MERRY-GO-ROUND AS WELL...

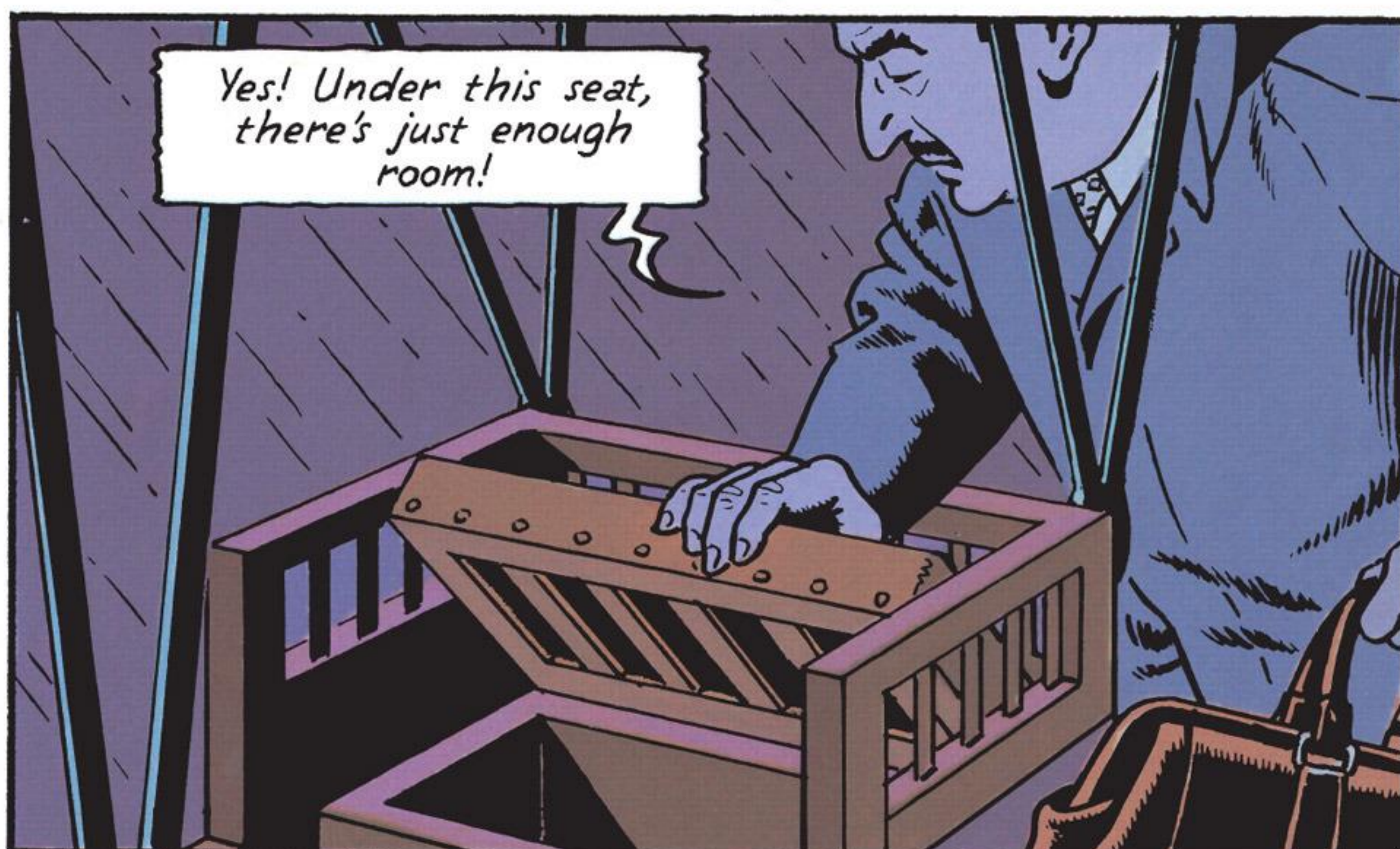
This is just what I need!



I have to find a "safe spot"... Let's see... The horses? Not a chance... Ah! Maybe the suspended benches...?



Yes! Under this seat, there's just enough room!



HE QUICKLY RETRIEVES THE NECKLACE FROM THE BAG AND, AFTER WRAPPING IT IN HIS SCARF, DEPOSITS IT IN THE HIDING PLACE...



That's done! And now I'm getting out of here! At this point, the best course of action is to contact Sir Henry as quickly as possible and pretend this was another kidnapping attempt...



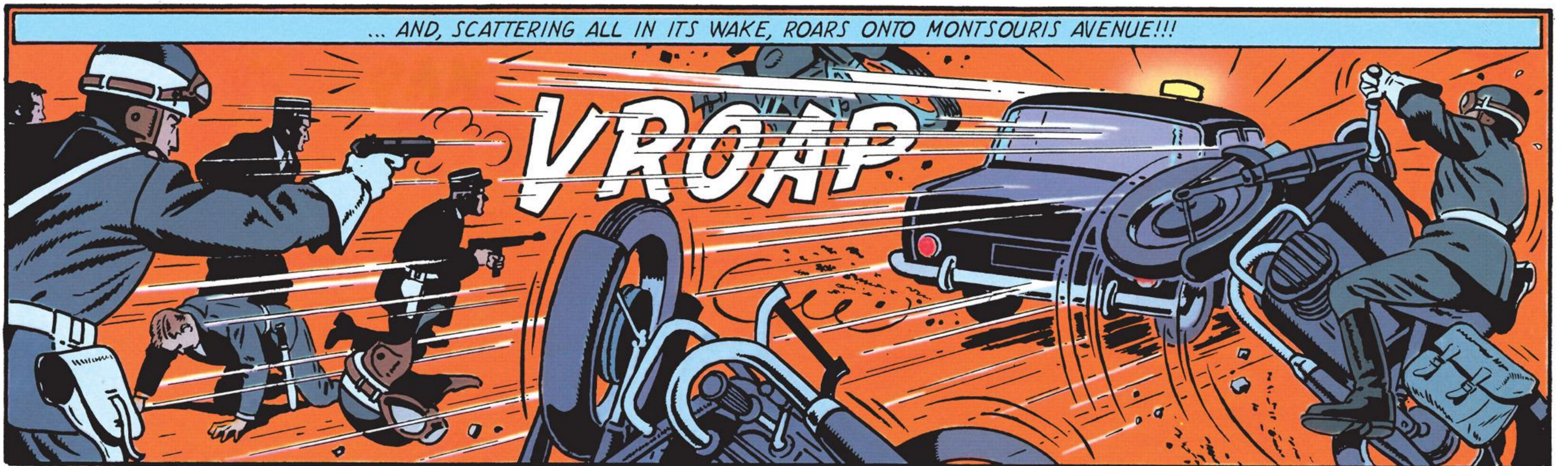
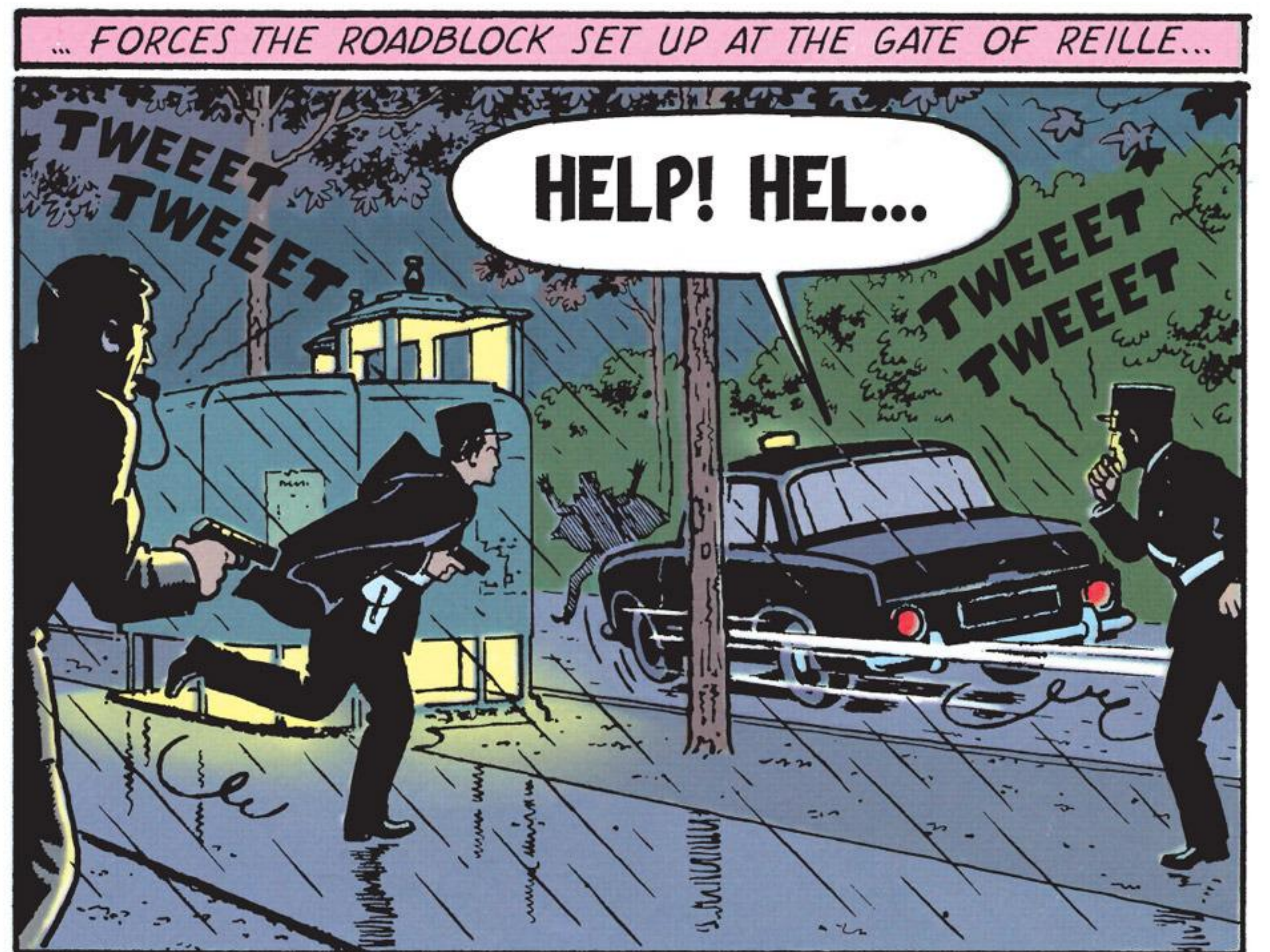
THIRTY SECONDS LATER, HE'S THROUGH THE OPENED SMALL GATE AND FINDS HIMSELF IN GAZON STREET...

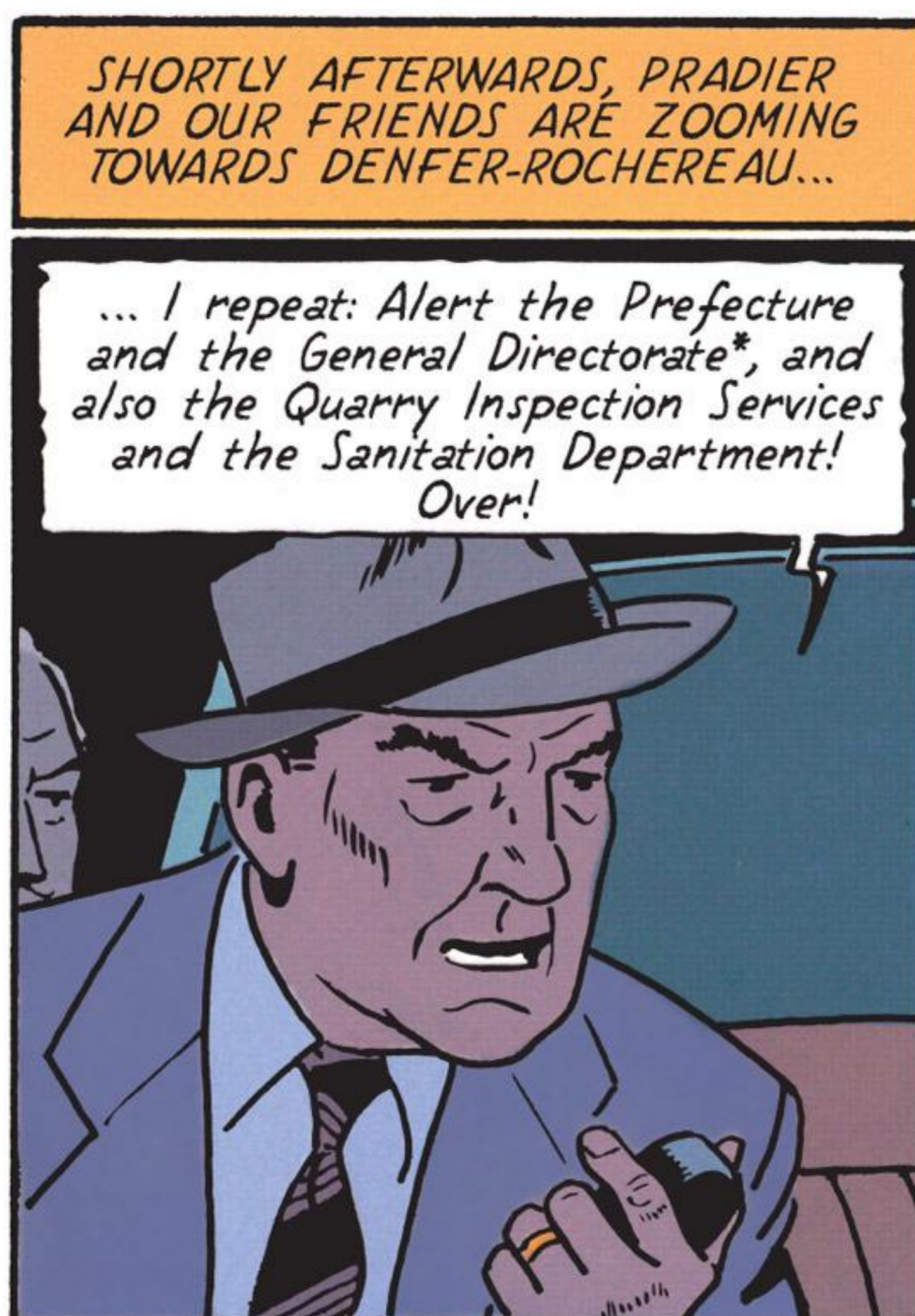


JUST AS A TAXI DRIVES UP TO HIS LEVEL!

A TAXI!!! What luck!! HEY!!!

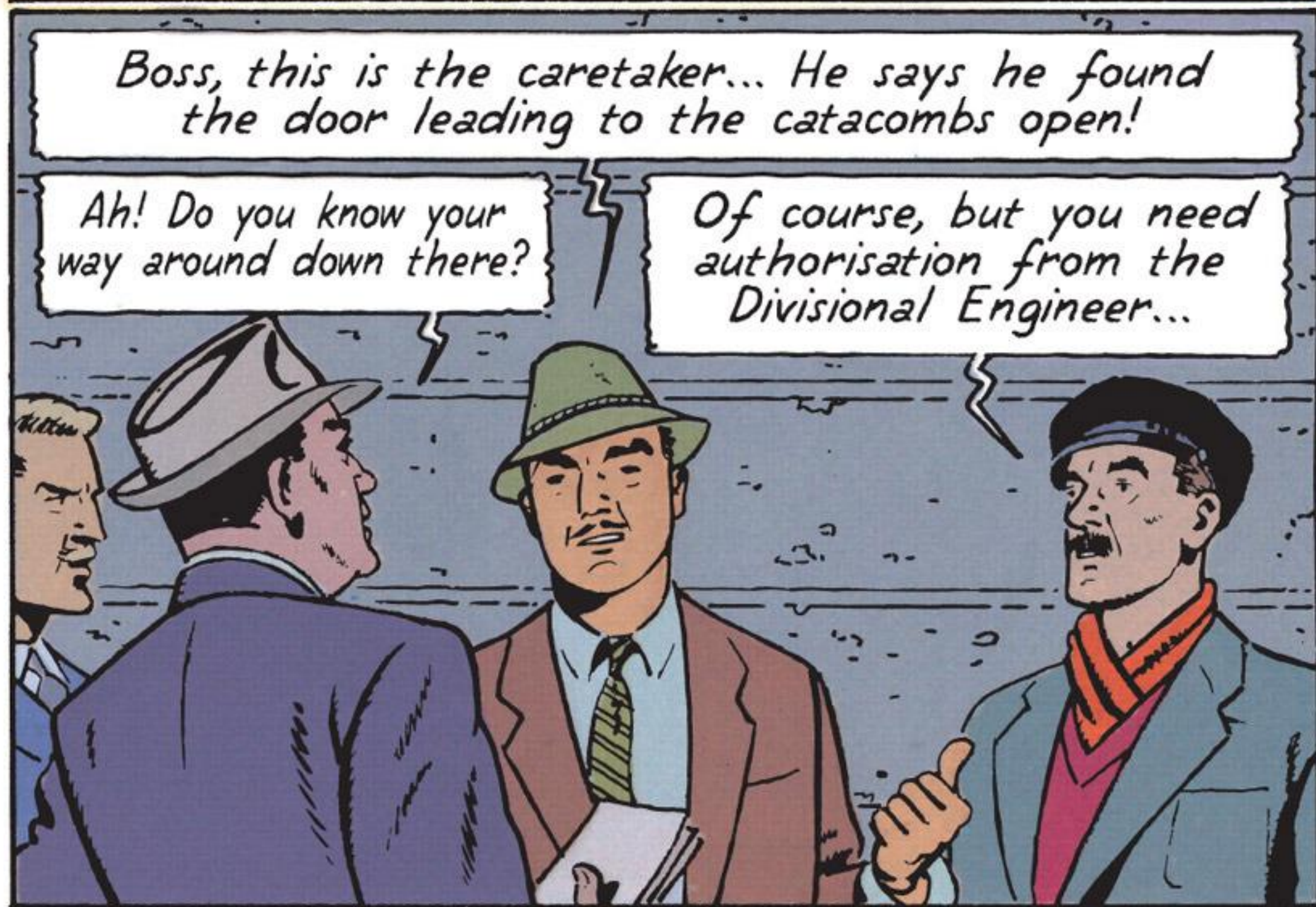






*AT THE TIME, THE FRENCH POLICE WERE DIVIDED BETWEEN THE NATIONAL POLICE, UNDER THE GENERAL DIRECTORATE, AND THE PARIS POLICE, UNDER THE PRÉFECTURE DE POLICE.

BUT THE ARRIVAL OF AN INSPECTOR BRINGS OUR FRIENDS BACK TO MORE IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATIONS...



Boss, this is the caretaker... He says he found the door leading to the catacombs open!

Ah! Do you know your way around down there?

Of course, but you need authorisation from the Divisional Engineer...

Sorry! We don't have time to wait for him!

Very well, then! But it's your responsibility...

FOLLOWING THE CARETAKER, THE POLICEMEN ENTER THE SMALL COURTYARD OF THE OLD OCTROI* HOUSE...

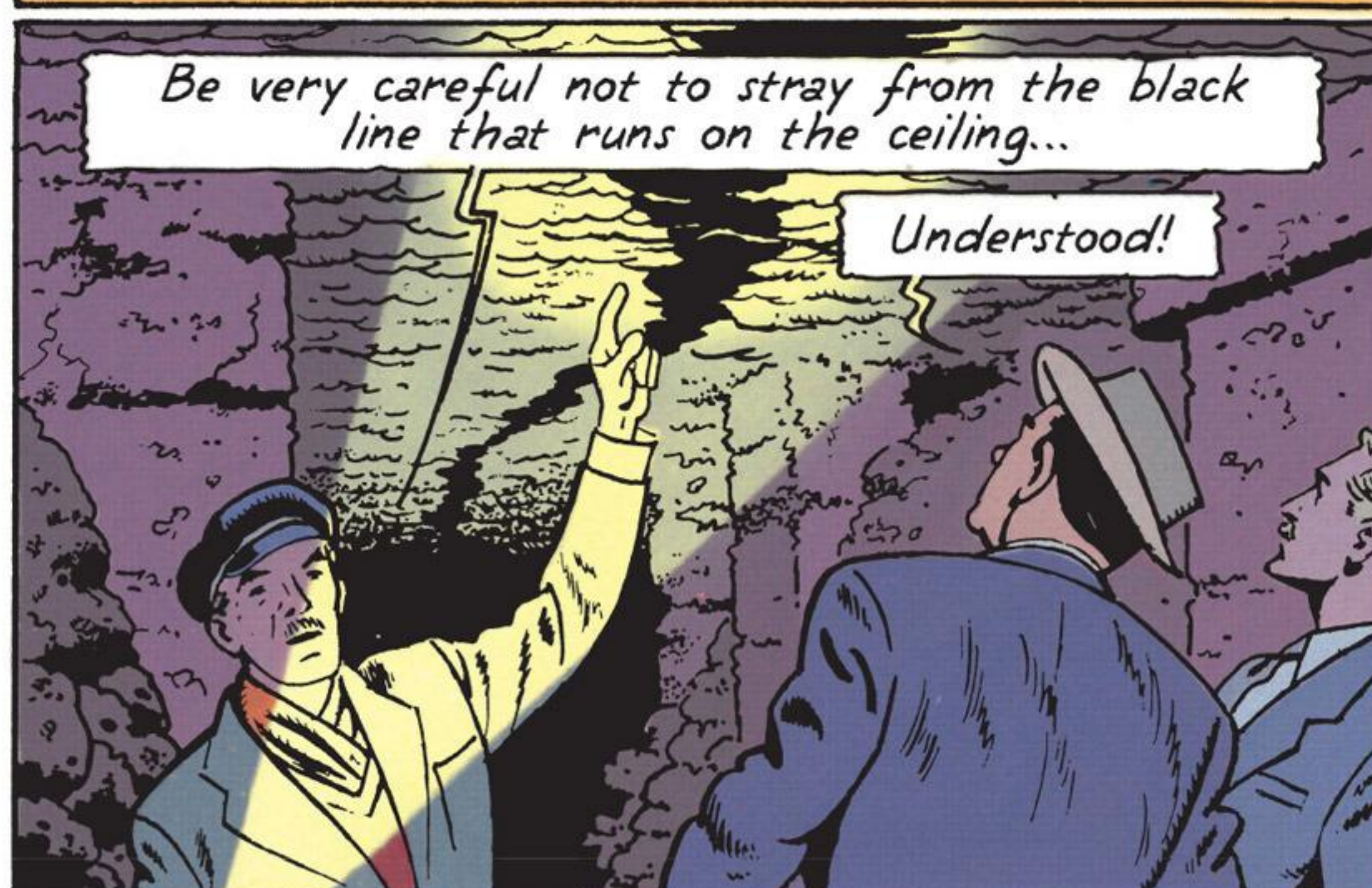


The entrance is around back, to the left...



Watch your step! It's steep!

AFTER GOING DOWN SOME 90 STEPS, THE SMALL PARTY HAS ARRIVED AT THE ENTRANCE OF A NARROW TUNNEL FOUR FEET WIDE AND SEVEN FEET HIGH...



Be very careful not to stray from the black line that runs on the ceiling...

Understood!



So, Sharkey, that hideout of yours...?

Er... It's further on, near the stiff's...

BY THE LIGHT OF ELECTRIC TORCHES, THE STRANGE PROCESSION DESCENDS INTO THE DARK LABYRINTH... THE TUNNEL GOES ON, TWISTS, TURNS BACK ON ITSELF, CONTINUES ON... HERE AND THERE OTHER GALLERIES, BLOCKED BY METAL GATES, OPEN IN THE WALLS...

This single column formation is not to my taste...

Indeed, in case of an "accident", it'd be impossible to intervene...



Boy, this place really is cheerful! Look at those passageways!

"The Mysteries of Paris": Follow your guide!

Yeah! I think going down one of them would be a bad idea!

I say! I hear they go on like that for over 200 miles!



That reminds me of the story of the doorman at the Val-de-Grâce hospital who, when he tried to go and raid the cellars of the Carthusian monastery, got completely lost in this maze!

Yeah, and when he was finally found, 11 years later, his soles were completely worn from walking!



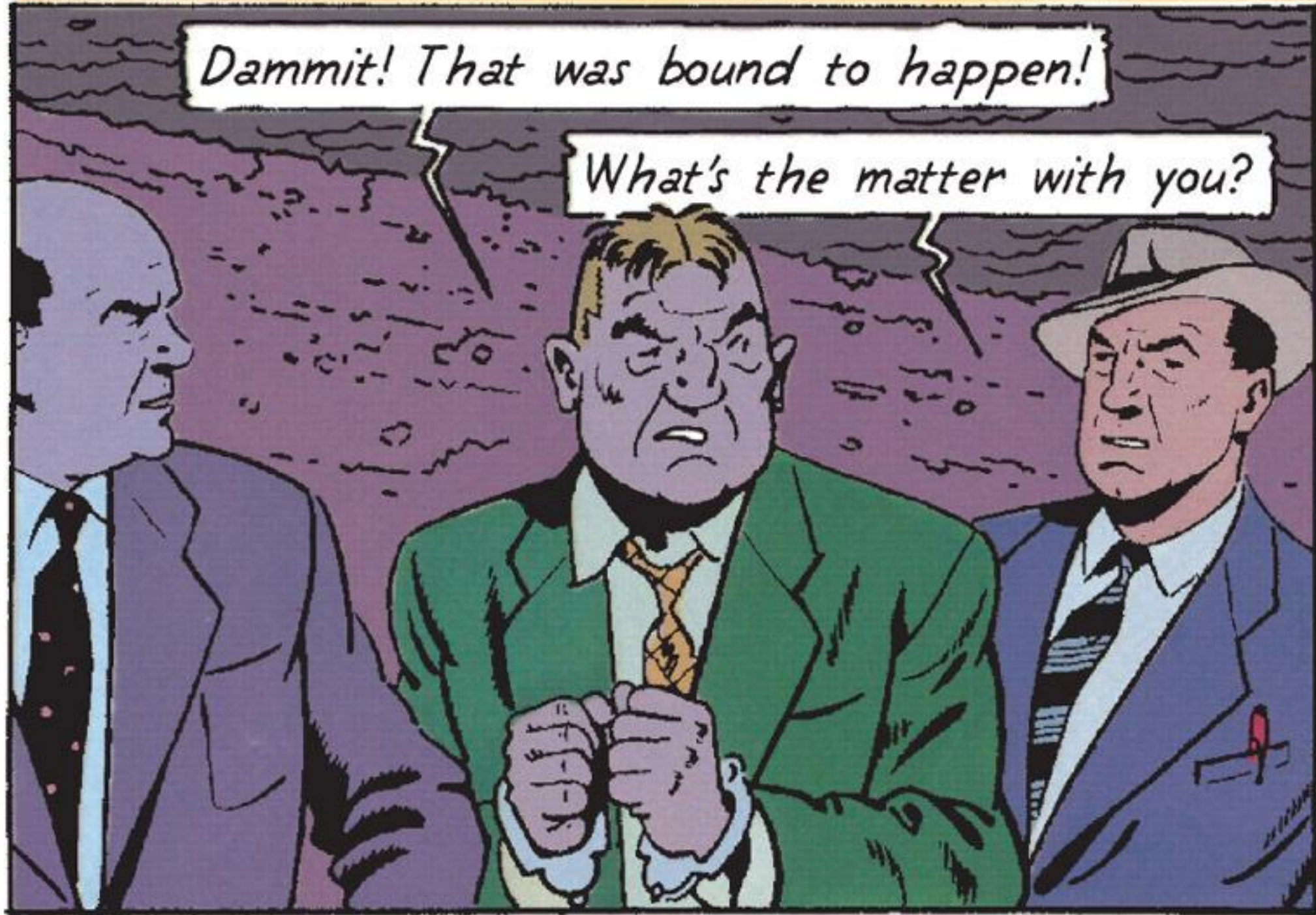
And also, not so long ago, some students at Polytechnique** went and...

Look! Can't you talk about something else!?



*OCTROI: AN ANCIENT FORM OF TAX ON THE IMPORT OF BASIC MERCHANDISE, WHICH SERVED TO FINANCE FORTIFICATIONS AND PUBLIC WORKS—ESPECIALLY HIGHWAYS
**ECOLE POLYTECHNIQUE: FRANCE'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS ENGINEERING SCHOOL

BUT NOW SHARKEY STOPS IN HIS TRACKS...



The matter is that I took a wrong turn!



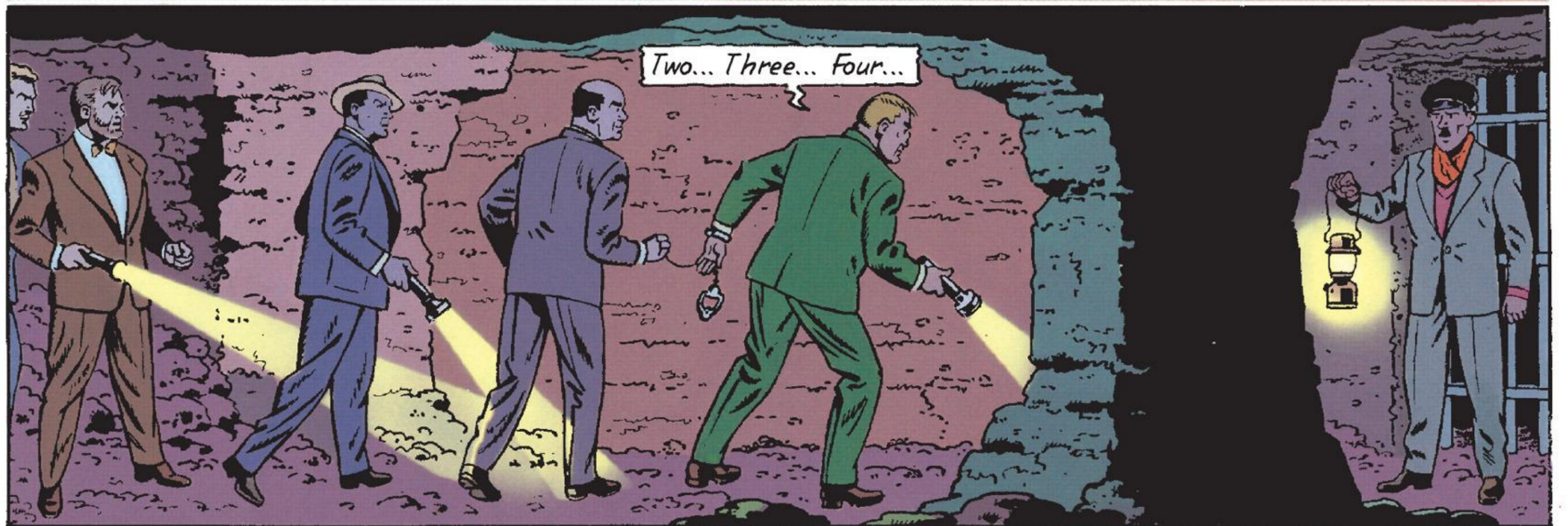
Listen, Commissioner, the only way to proceed is to count the steps between two markers... How do you want me to get it right when that pet ape of yours is dragging me along in handcuffs and without light!?



Er... All right... Uncuff his right hand and give him a torch... But don't let go of the chain...



THUS HALF FREED, SHARKEY, AN INTENT LOOK ON HIS FACE, STARTS WALKING THE LENGTH OF THE TUNNEL, LOOKING CLOSELY AT EVERY SQUARE INCH OF THE GROUND... STILL FOLLOWED BY HIS GUARDIAN, HE SLOWLY HEADS BACK TOWARDS THE GATED ENTRANCE OF A SIDE TUNNEL IN FRONT OF WHICH THE CARETAKER IS STANDING...

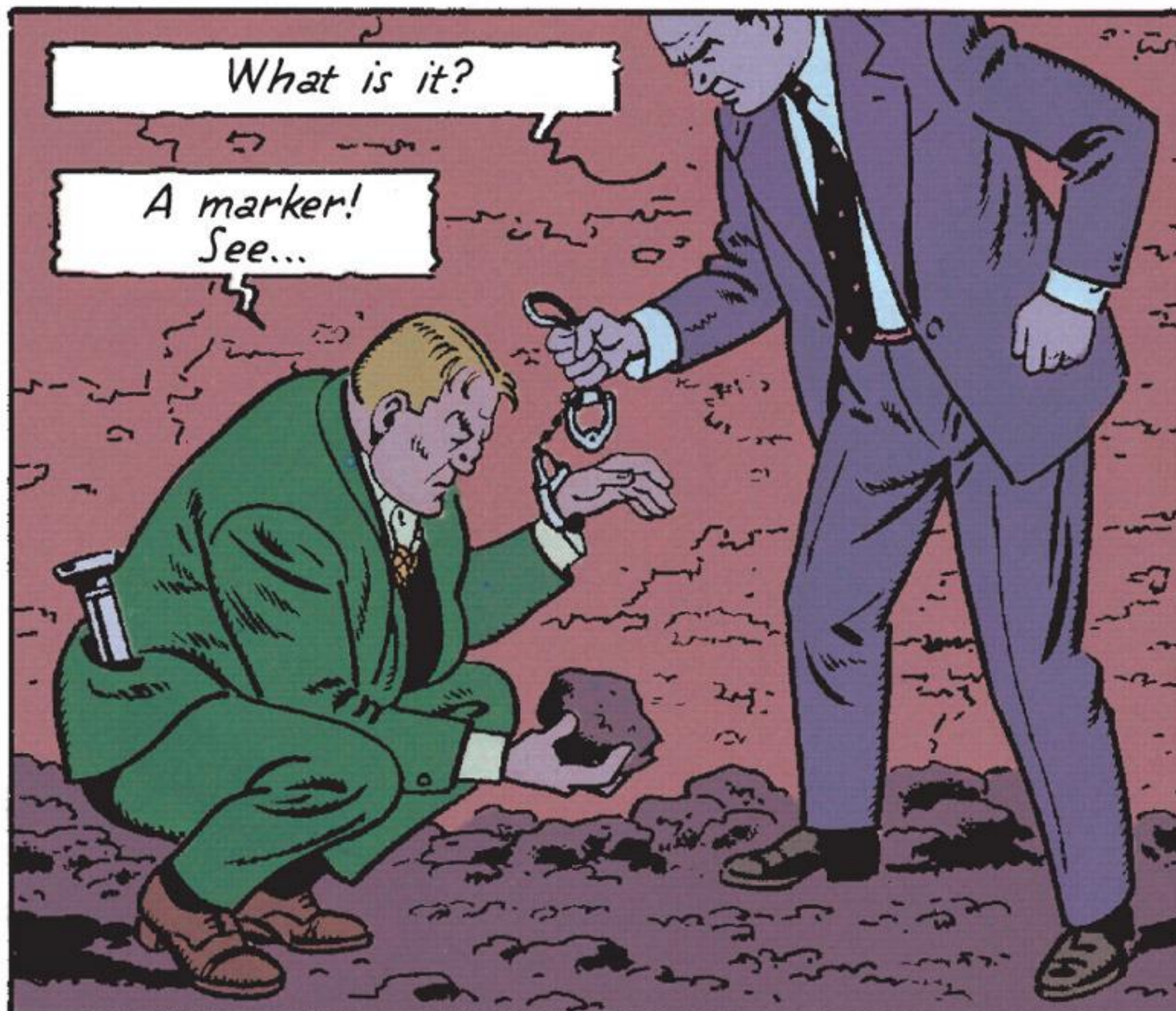


HE'S BARELY SIX FEET AWAY FROM THE MAN WHEN...



What is it?

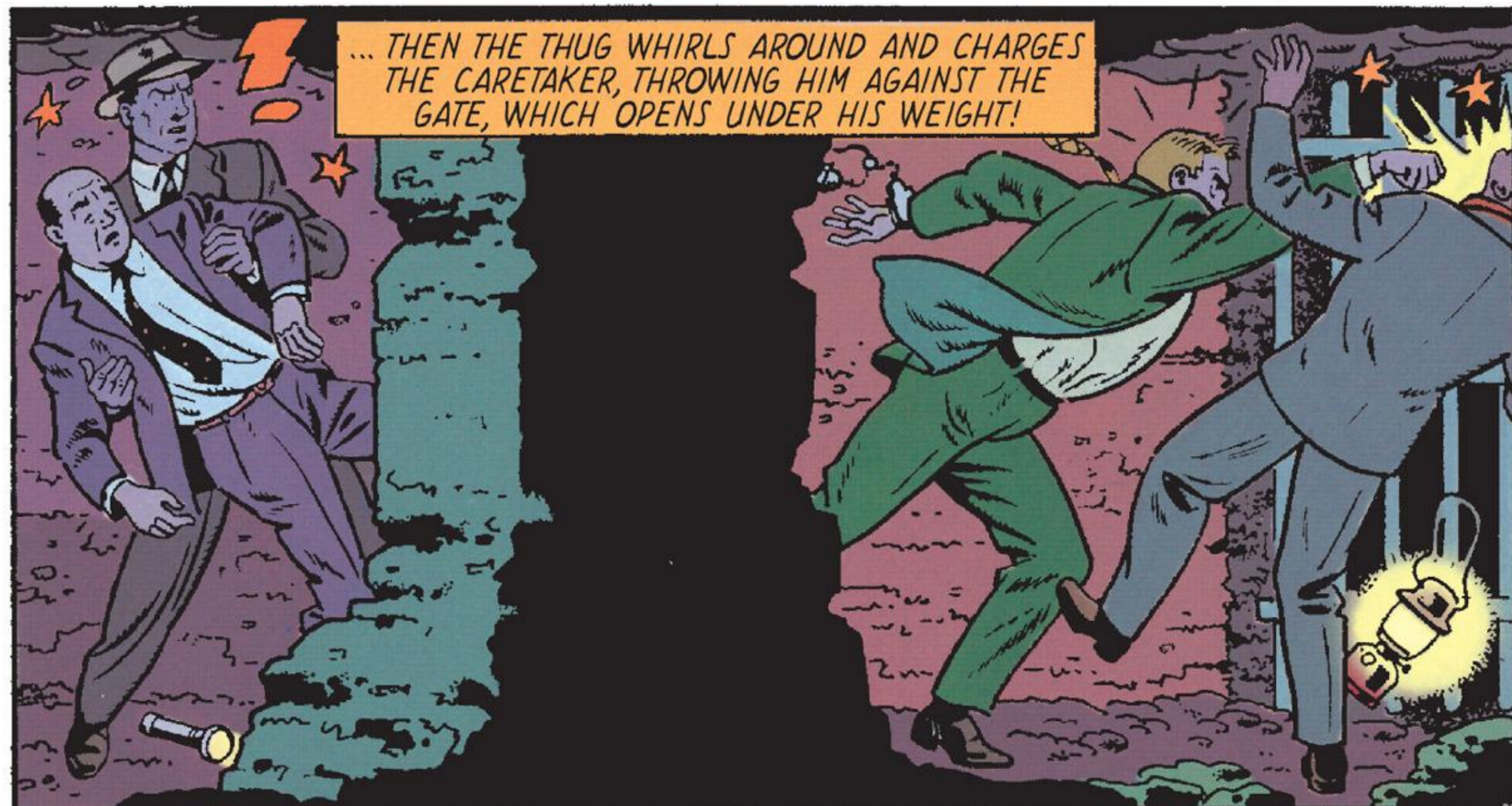
A marker! See...



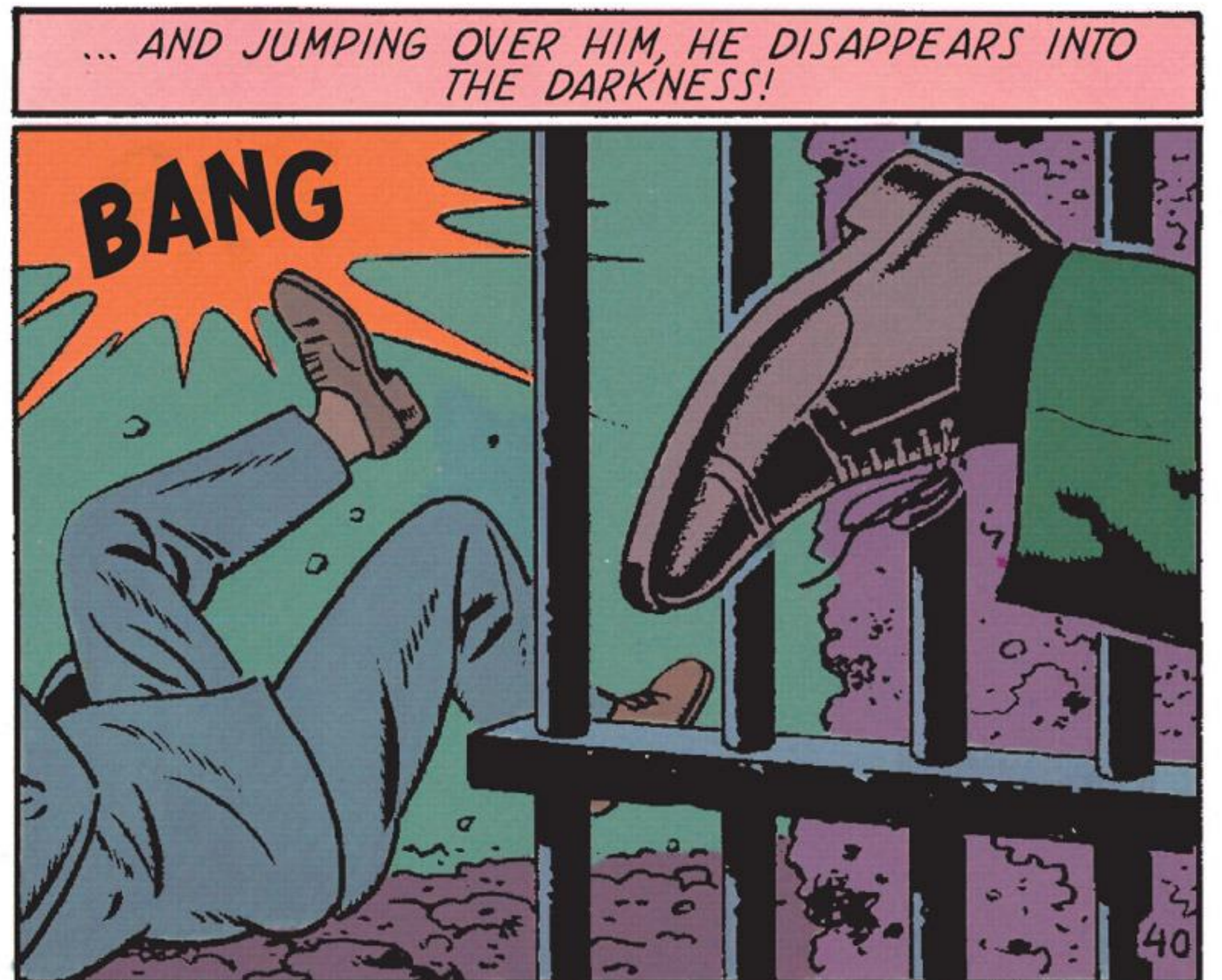
BUT SUDDENLY...



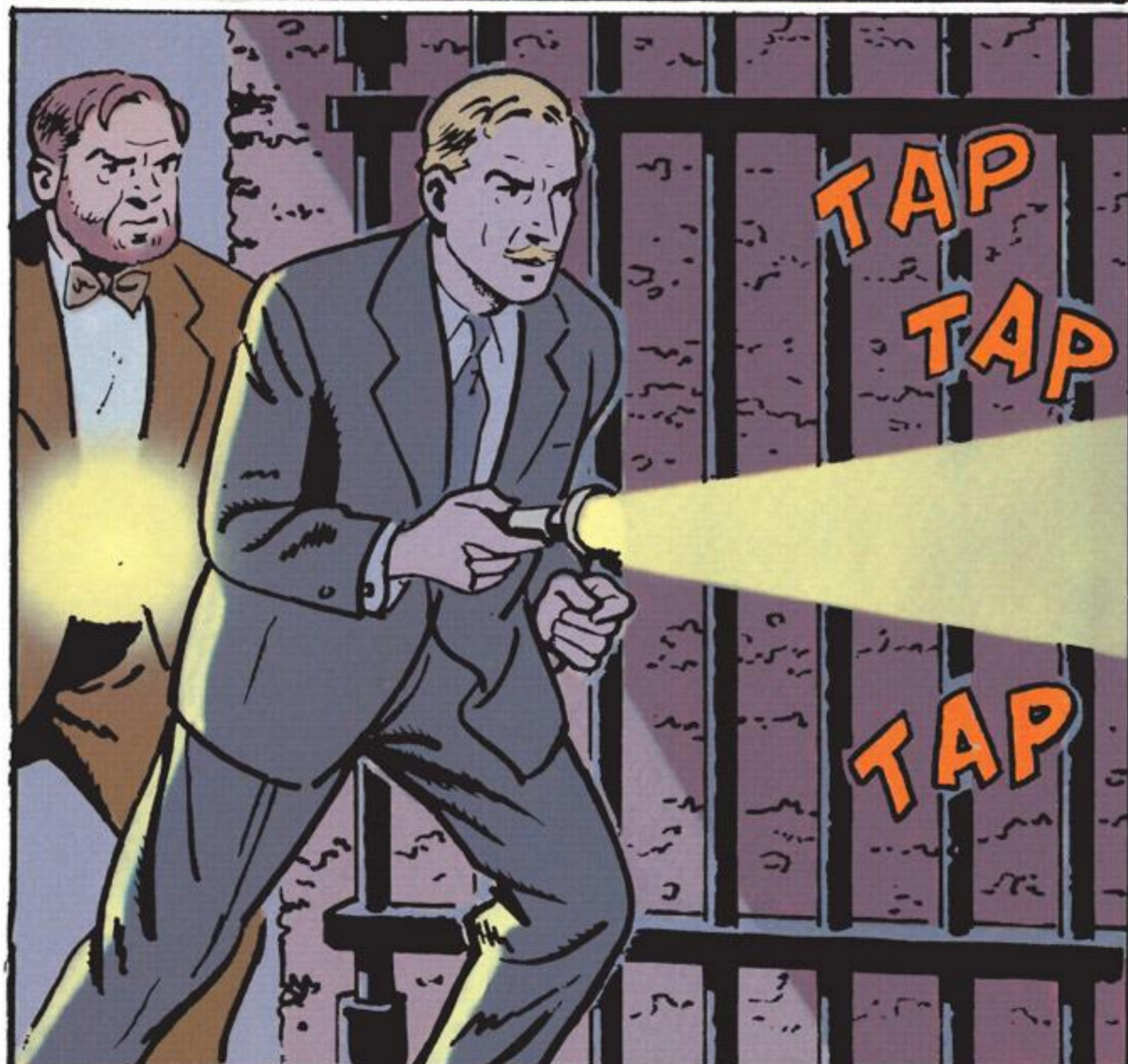
... THEN THE THUG WHIRLS AROUND AND CHARGES THE CARETAKER, THROWING HIM AGAINST THE GATE, WHICH OPENS UNDER HIS WEIGHT!



... AND JUMPING OVER HIM, HE DISAPPEARS INTO THE DARKNESS!



PROPELLED BY AN IRRESISTIBLE REFLEX, BLAKE AND MORTIMER LUNGE FORWARD, AND...



... DEAF TO PRADIER'S CALLS DASH AFTER THE FUGITIVE...



... BUT SOON!



A FEW MORE SECONDS OF RUNNING, AND...



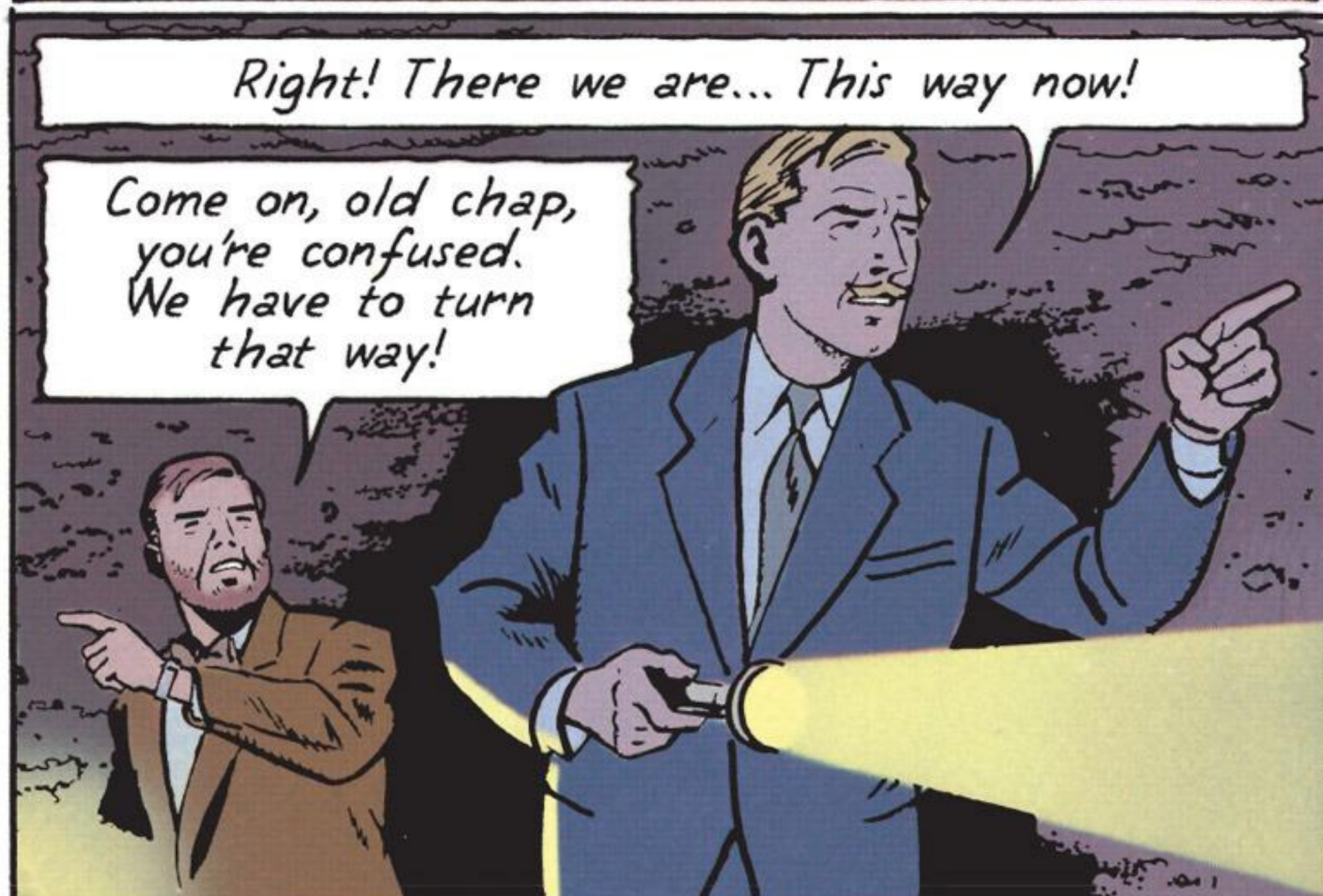
AND IT'S ONLY AT THAT POINT THAT THEY REALISE THEIR ZEAL HAS TAKEN THEM TOO FAR...

Erm... Say, Francis, where precisely are we, then?

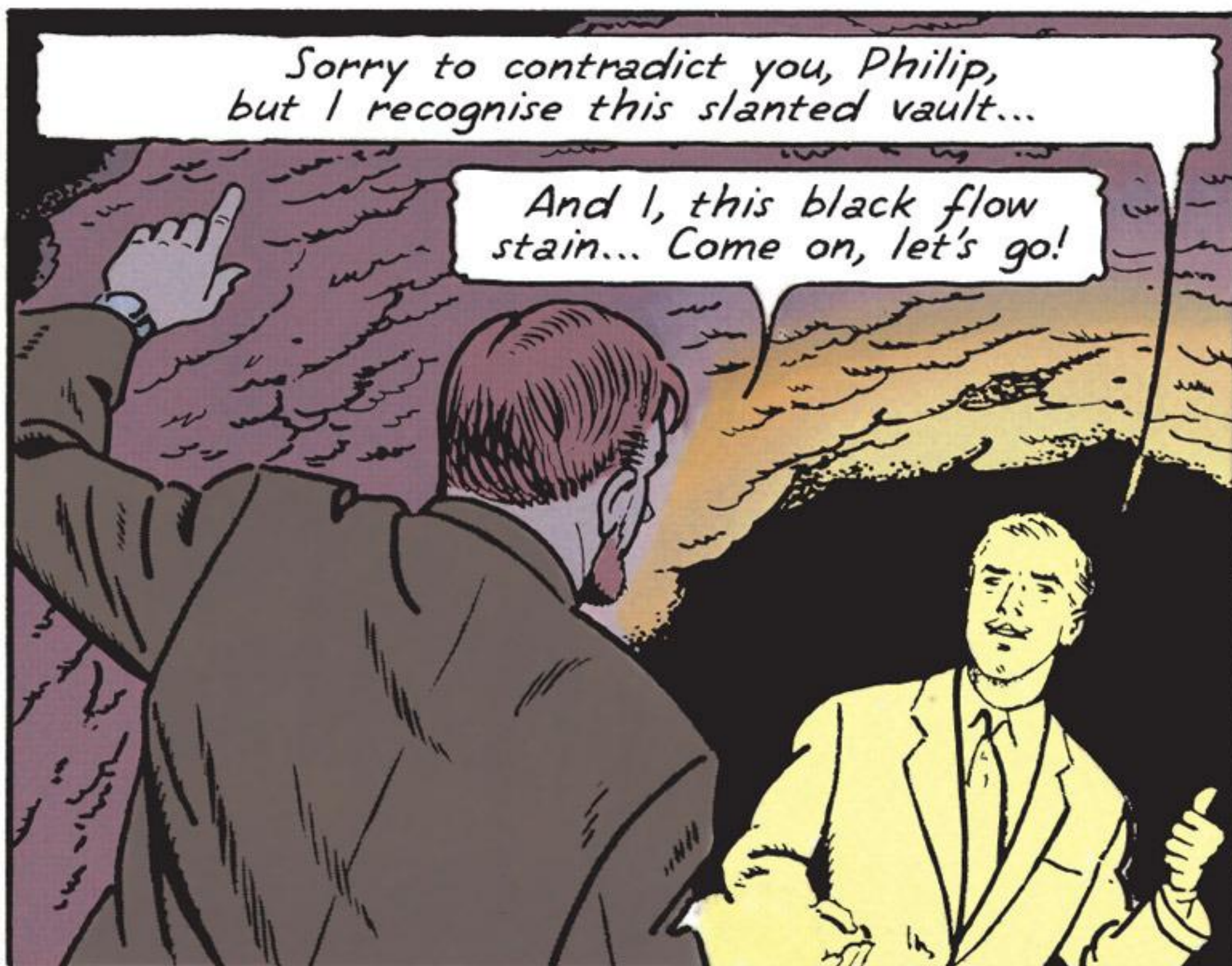
I think... er... that we have to take the very first right. No, wait... left, rather!



A MINUTE LATER...



A FEW TURNS, SOME MORE RUNNING BACK AND FORTH, AND OUR FRIENDS STOP, NONPLUSSED...



BUT AFTER AN EXHAUSTING SERIES OF TWISTS AND TURNS...



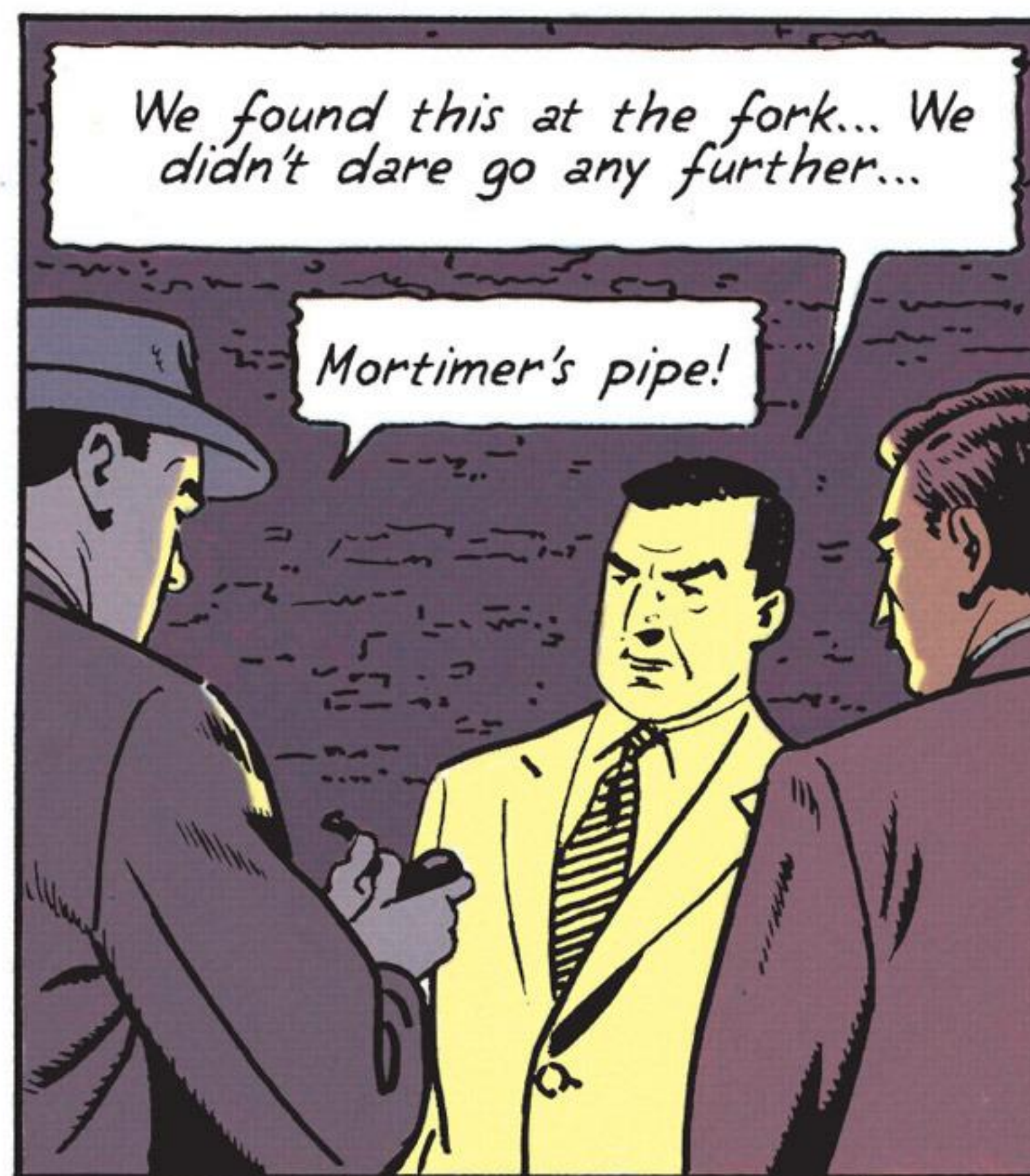
IMMEDIATELY...



BUT ONLY THE ECHO ANSWERS MORTIMER'S CALLS.



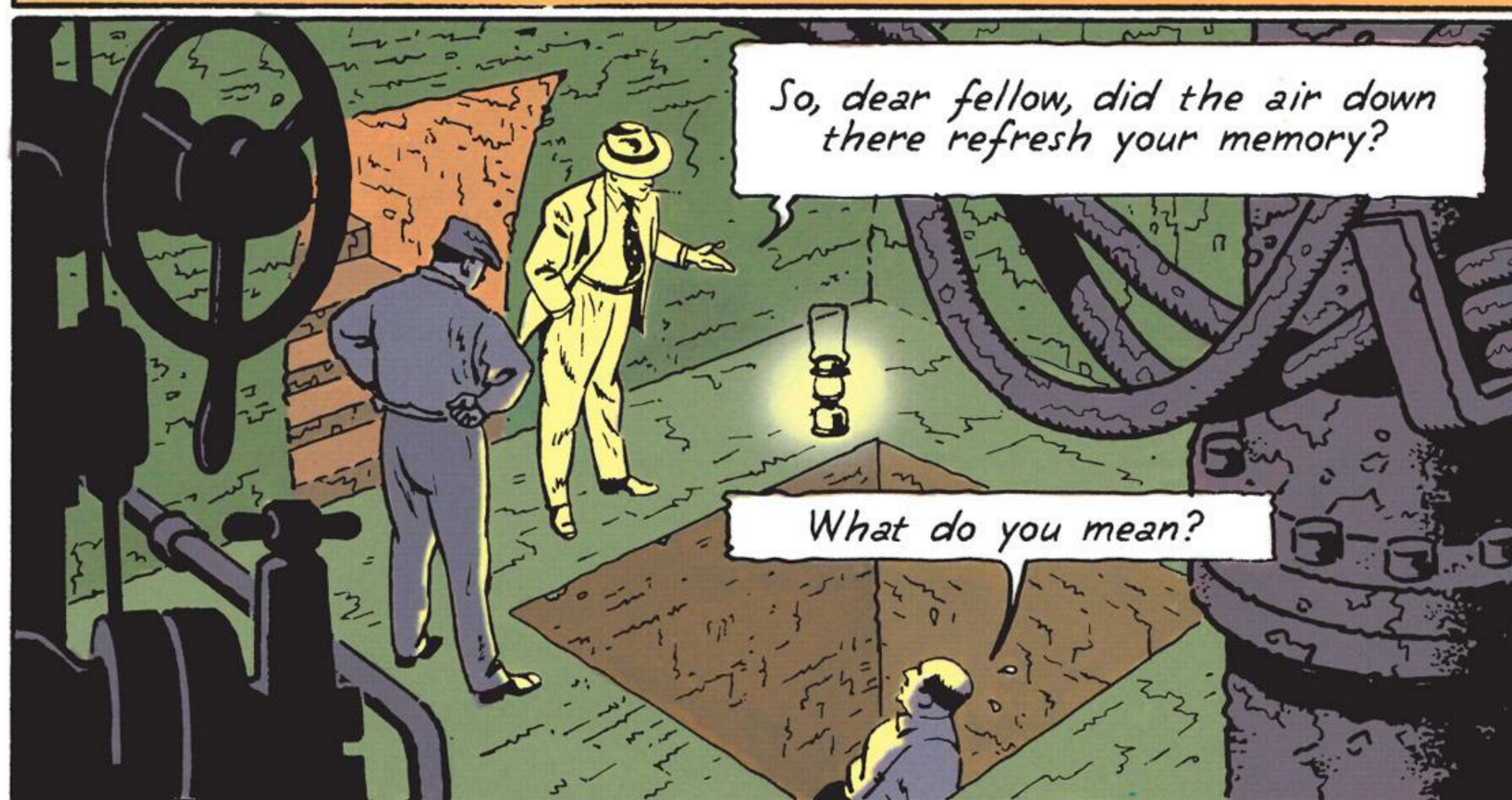
AT THE SAME MOMENT, PRADIER, WHO'S ADVANCED TO THE FIRST CROSSROADS OF THE SIDE TUNNEL, UNDERSTANDS HOW CRUELLY USELESS HIS EFFORTS ARE...



WHILE THESE DRAMATIC EVENTS UNFOLD, SOMEWHERE UNDER PARIS, IN A REFUGE RIGGED BY THE RESISTANCE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR...



DURANTON HAS INDEED COME TO, TIED UP TO A CHAIR PLACED AT THE BOTTOM OF A SORT OF PIT WITH OOZING WALLS...



STILL OUT OF BREATH, SHARKEY'S RUSHED TO OLRİK'S SIDE...



WORRIED, THE BANDITS HAVE DRAWN CLOSER...



Sorry, dear fellow. But your guardian angels' zeal is forcing us to speed things up... So... your answer?



Very well. I like clear-cut situations. They save time! Go ahead, Sharkey!



SHARKEY TURNS A WHEEL, AND...



A little hydrotherapy! First a nice footbath... Then a cooling hip bath... And finally, if you persist... IN THE DRINK!!!



No big words, please? In case your memory comes back to you... call, and the water will stop... I'll leave you to your meditations!



And now, your orders: I want a sentry down there... On alert at all times... No lights, no cigarettes... To be relieved every half-hour... Everyone else upstairs on standby... Absolutely no leaving the house... Got it?

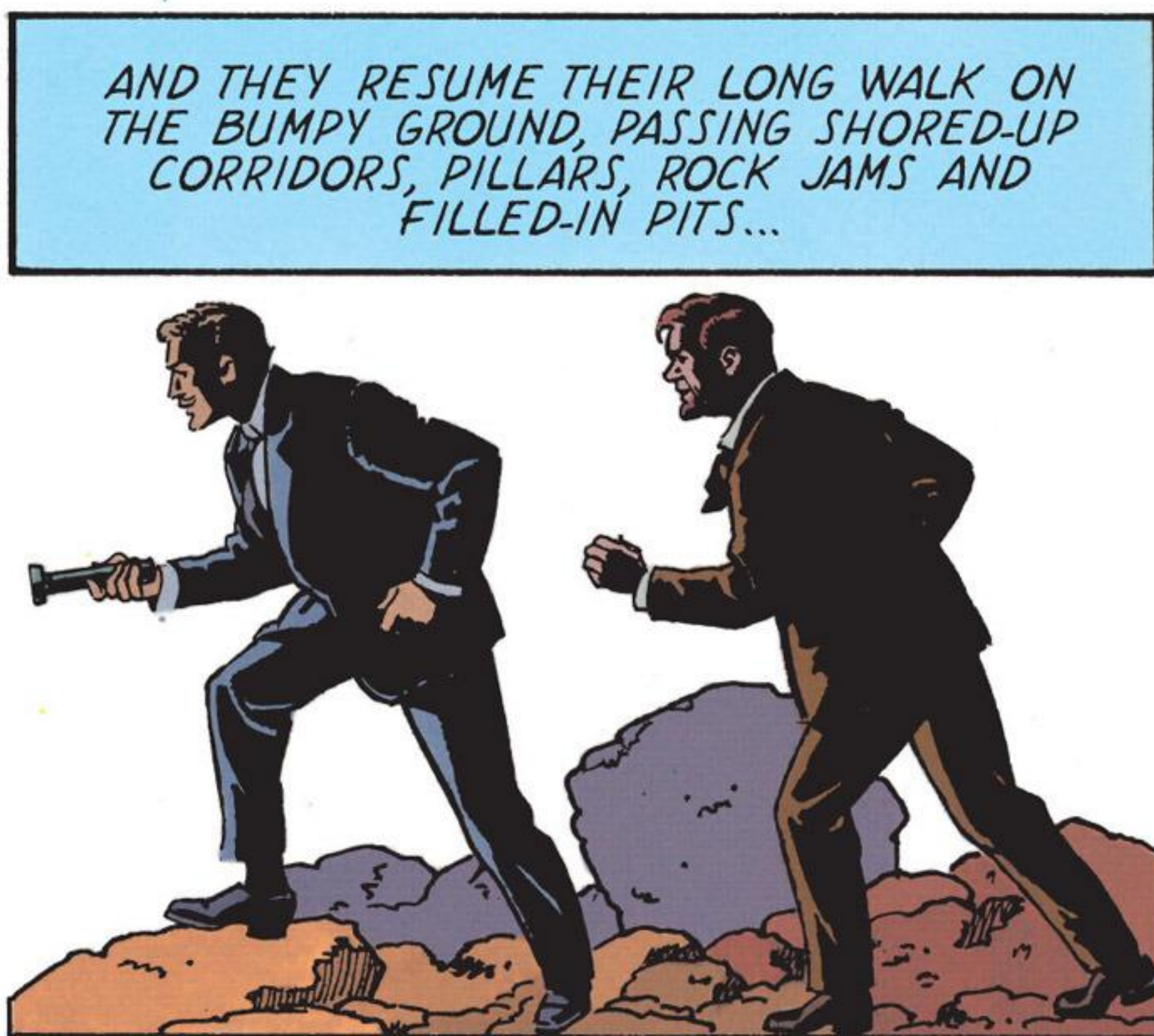
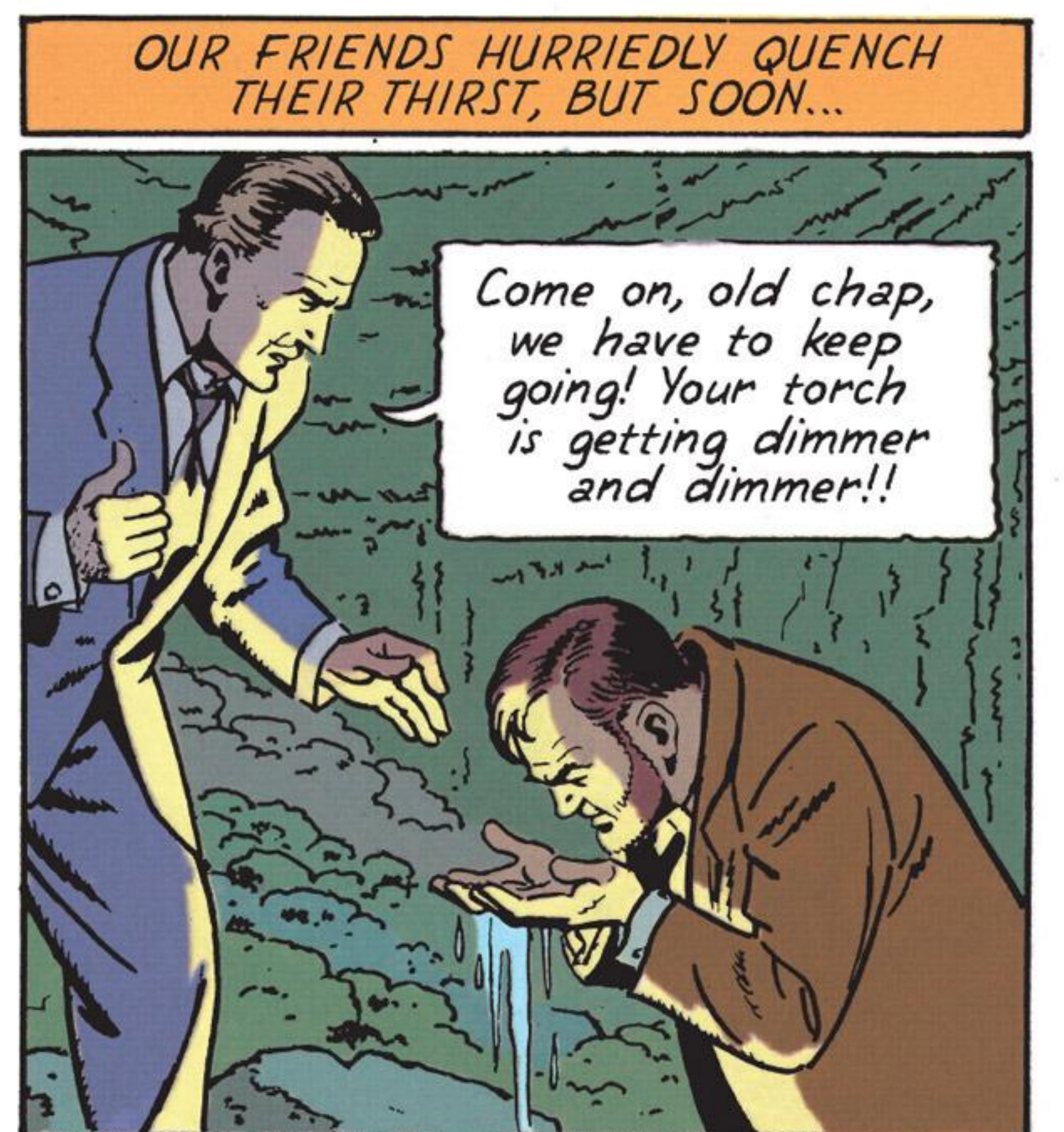
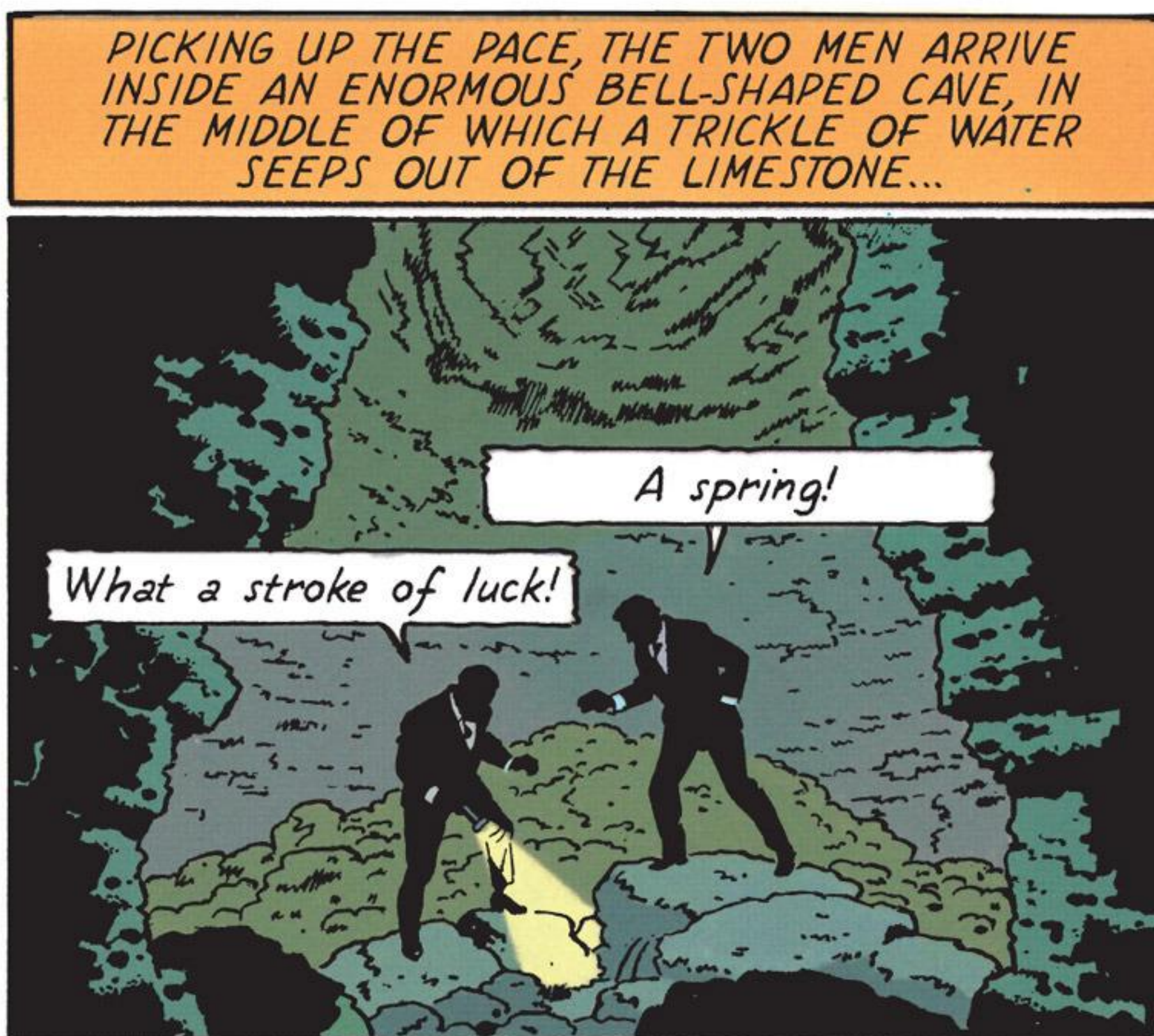


BANDIT! MURDERER!!!



MEANWHILE, BY THE LIGHT OF ONLY ONE OF THEIR TORCHES, BLAKE AND MORTIMER, SLIPPING AND STUMBLING, TRY IN VAIN TO MAKE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE INFERNAL MAZE OF TUNNELS—SOME WIDE, SOME NARROW—THAT BRANCH OUT AND MULTIPLY ENDLESSLY...





FEVERISHLY, THE TWO MEN BEGIN WORKING ON A THEORY THAT COULD SUSTAIN THEIR HYPOTHESIS...

Let's assume the double line means "Stop! Don't go any further!" and the arrow "GO! Follow this direction"...

Well... In that case, the tunnel across from these signs should have a corresponding indication...



There it is! An arrow, meaning: GO!!

If that's the case, we have a choice between doubling back on our tracks or continuing through this corridor... What shall we do?



Let's go on!

All right!



FULL OF HOPE, OUR TWO FRIENDS HAVE RESUMED THEIR TREK, BUT ENORMOUS HEAPS OF ROCKS AND DIRT FORCE THEM INTO EXHAUSTING CLIMBS...

Yes, it's completely rotten over here... And the merest shock could have disastrous consequences!

Good grief! Look at all these fallen rocks, and the fissured ceilings!



Watch out! Another collapse!

... And no more signs... This is worrisome...



Oh! There! Another passage!

Does it have a sign?!



YES! IT'S THERE... LOOK...

SAVED!!



AND, UNABLE TO CONTAIN HIS JOY, MORTIMER LETS OUT A VIGOROUS...

HURRAY

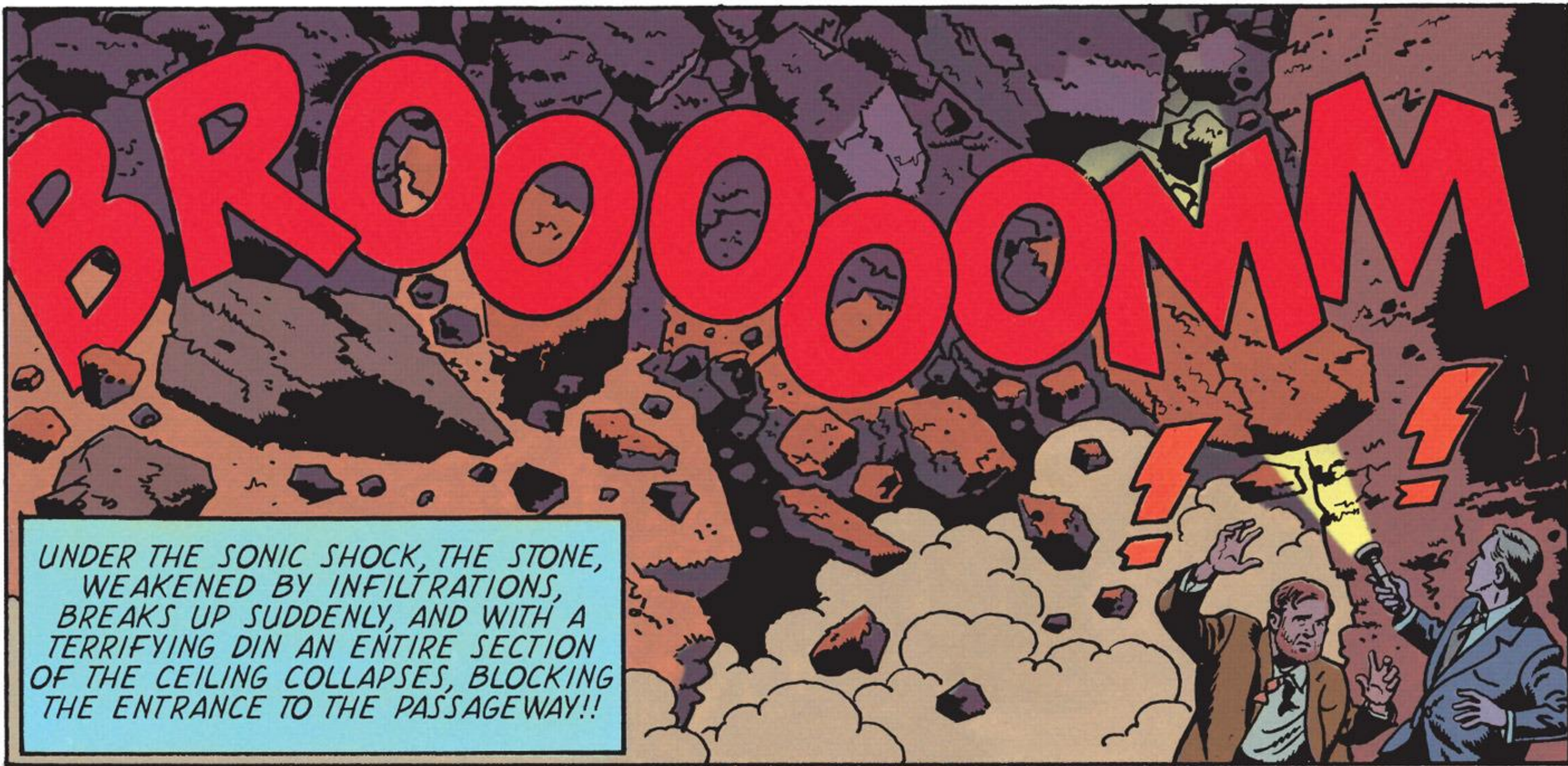


BUT THE ONLY ANSWER TO THIS INTEMPERATE EXPRESSION OF ENTHUSIASM IS A LOW GRUMBING THAT BEGINS TO INCREASE IN VOLUME...

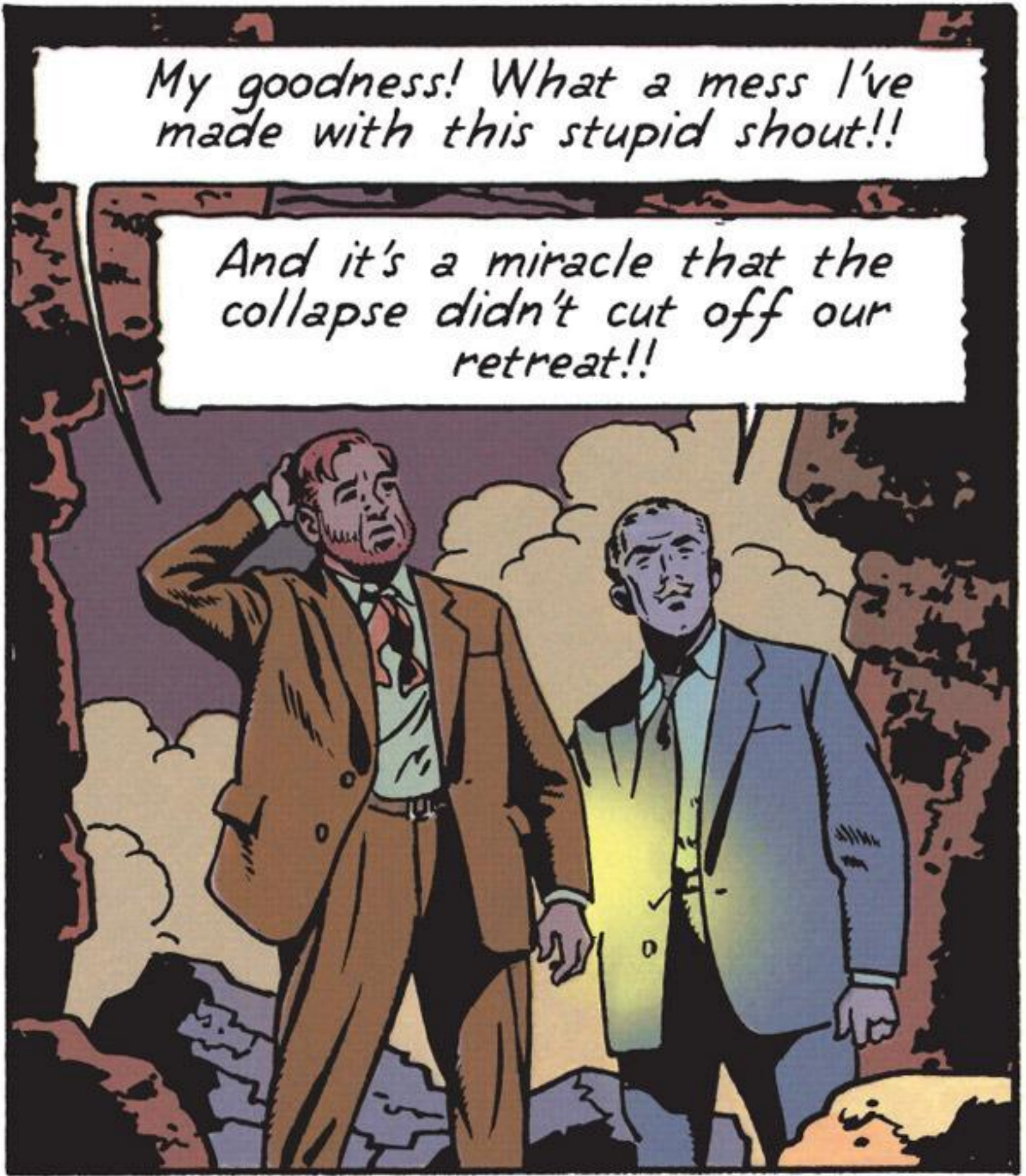
BROOOOM

WHAT'S HAPPENING!?!
GET BACK!!!





UNDER THE SONIC SHOCK, THE STONE, WEAKENED BY INFILTRATIONS, BREAKS UP SUDDENLY, AND WITH A TERRIFYING DIN AN ENTIRE SECTION OF THE CEILING COLLAPSES, BLOCKING THE ENTRANCE TO THE PASSAGEWAY!!



My goodness! What a mess I've made with this stupid shout!!

And it's a miracle that the collapse didn't cut off our retreat!!



We have no other alternative than doubling back... and in silence, this time!

Oh, as for that, I promise!

HAVING LEFT THE DANGEROUS AREA WITH THE UTMOST CAUTION, BLAKE AND MORTIMER SOON FIND THEMSELVES BACK AT THEIR STARTING POINT...



Let's try the other direction this time!

Lead on!

A HUNDRED YARDS OF WALKING BRINGS THEM TO A LARGE CHAMBER FROM WHICH SEVERAL GALLERIES RADIATE. THEY BEGIN INSPECTING THEM...



Nothing here... Let's see the next one...



THERE! THE "GO" ARROW!!

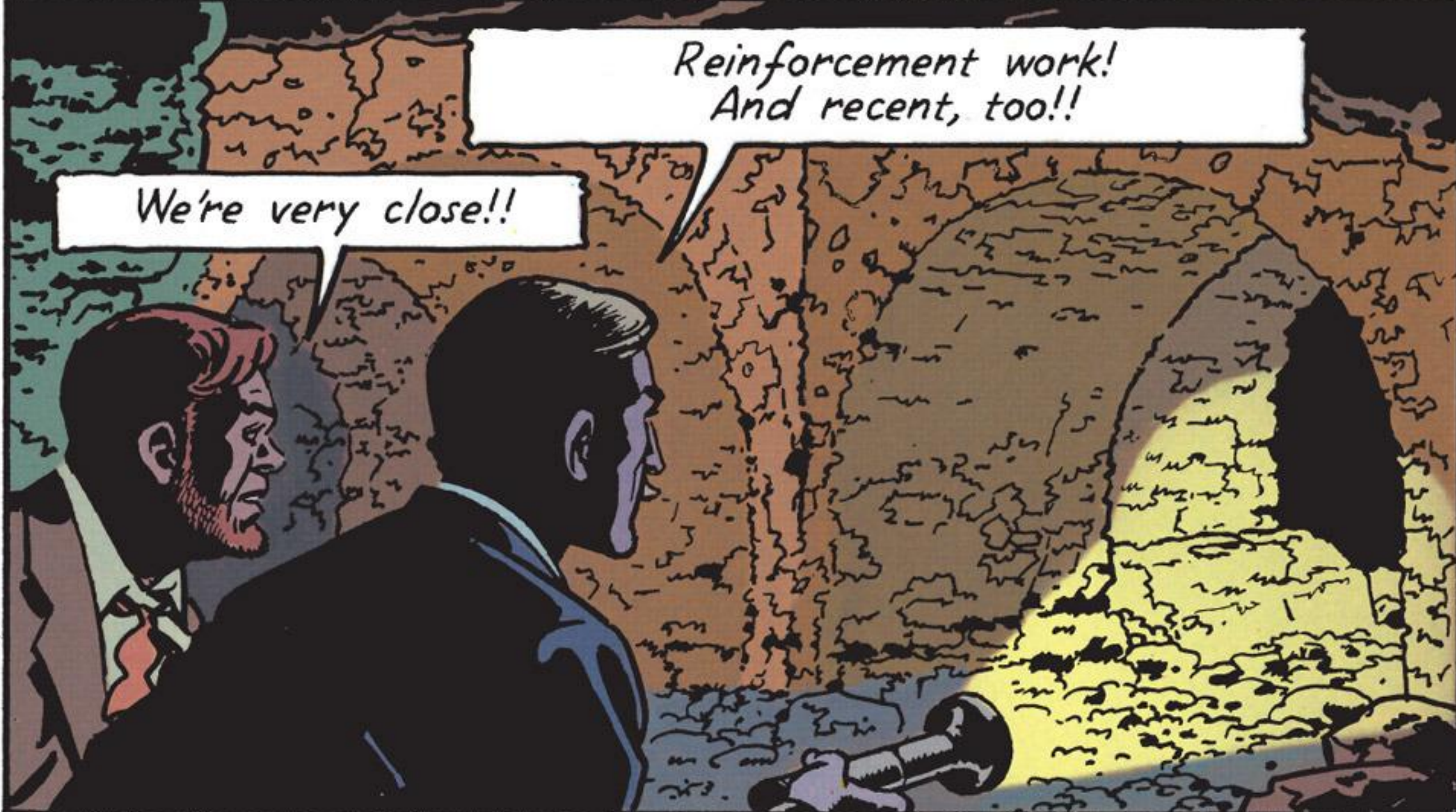
PHEW! WHAT A RELIEF!!

FROM THEN ON, AS THE SYMBOLS SUCCEED AND CORRESPOND TO EACH OTHER, OUR TWO FRIENDS TREK ON WITH RENEWED ENERGY, AND SUDDENLY...



OH!

A PORTION OF THE TUNNEL NETWORK APPEARS, THIS ONE WITH SOLIDLY BUILT VAULTS!



Reinforcement work! And recent, too!!

We're very close!!

AND, REDOUBLING THEIR EFFORTS, THEY PUSH ON...



Have you noticed these big rocks obviously blocking some galleries?

Yes, and I noticed that, curiously, they coincide with our itinerary...

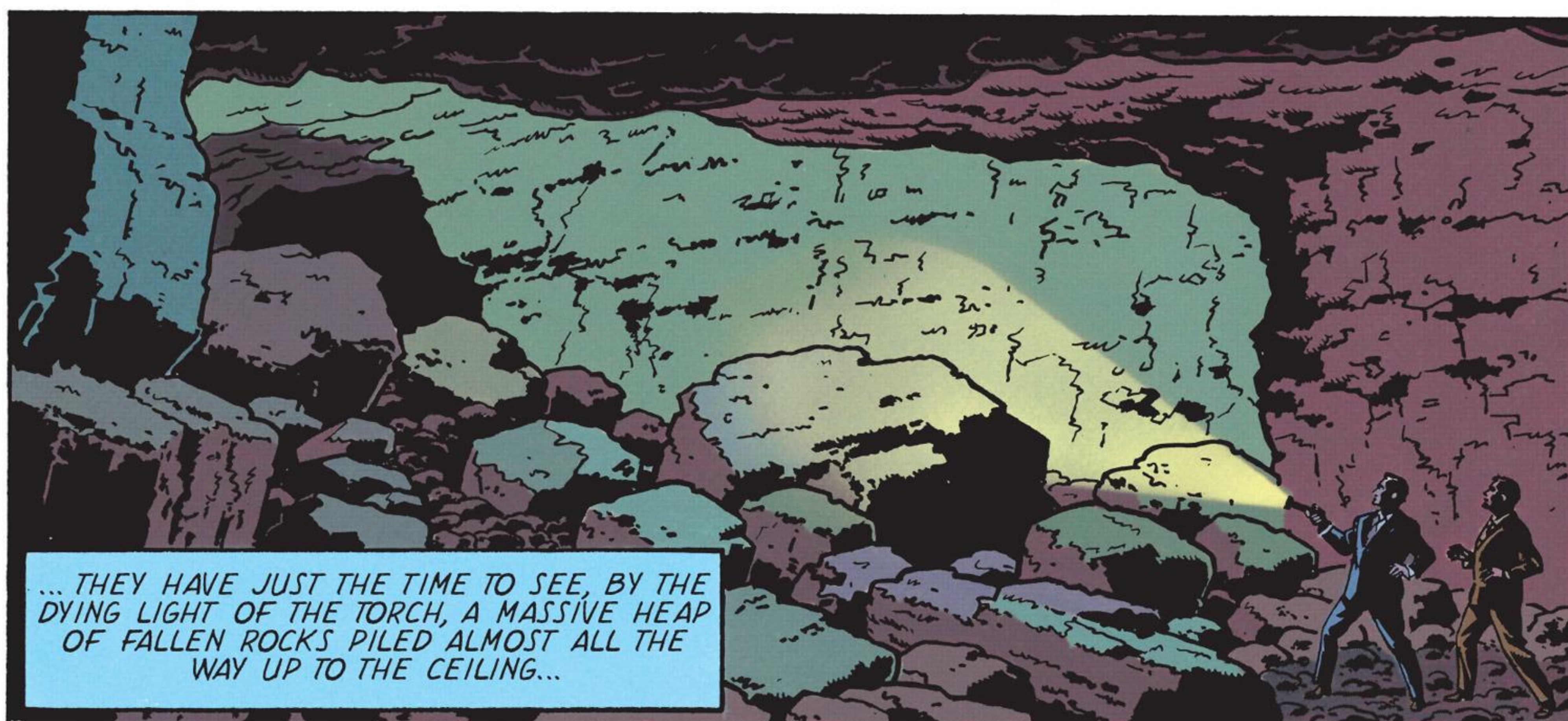
BUT A LITTLE FURTHER...



Huh? A rock... and the "GO" sign... Strange!

Indeed! And yet, we have to ignore it!

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THE SCENERY CHANGES... THE EVEN AND WELL-PROPPED-UP GALLERIES GIVE WAY TO NARROW TUNNELS WITH MUDDY FLOORS AND OOZING, JAGGED, EVER-LOWER CEILINGS THAT FORCE THE TWO MEN TO WALK WITH BENT BACKS...



IN THE OPPRESSIVE SILENCE, BROKEN ONLY BY THE DRIPPING OF WATER FROM THE CEILING, THE TWO MEN REMAIN FROZEN IN PLACE, EVERY SENSE ON ALERT...



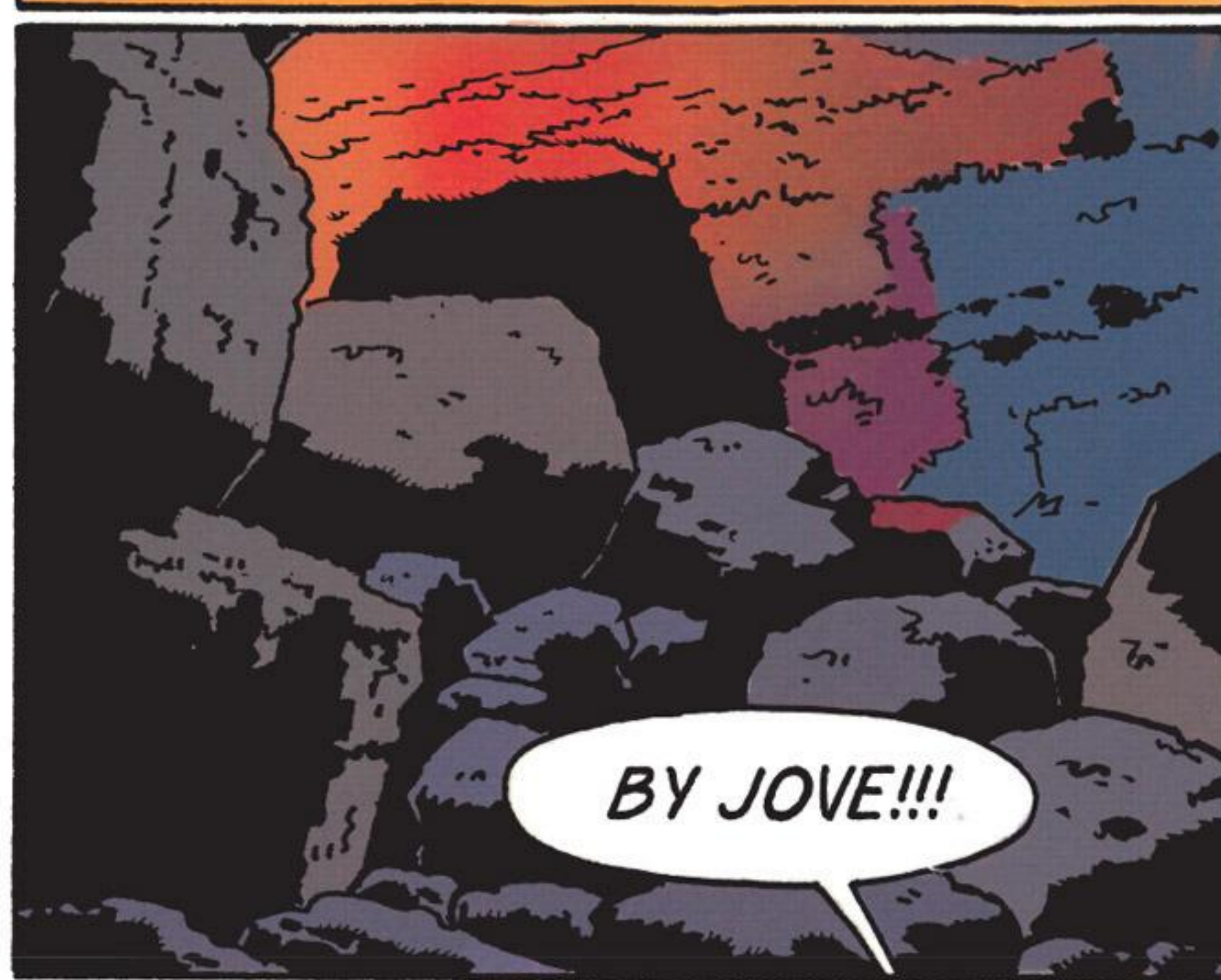
SUDDENLY BLAKE WHISPERS...



WITH A FORCEFUL SQUEEZE ON THE ARM, BLAKE STOPS HIS COMPANION COLD BEFORE HE CAN LET OUT THE CALL ALREADY ON HIS LIPS...



FROM THE TOP OF THE ROCKSLIDE, A DIM RED GLOW INTERMITTENTLY LIGHTS UP THE TUNNEL'S VAULT...



AT THAT VERY MOMENT, A MENACING VOICE BOOMS, CLOSE BY!!!



INSTINCTIVELY, BLAKE AND MORTIMER HAVE FLATTENED THEMSELVES AGAINST THE WALL, BUT ANOTHER VOICE, MORE DISTANT AND TEASING, CALLS BACK:



INVISIBLE TO OUR FRIENDS, TWO VILLAINOUS-LOOKING INDIVIDUALS HAVE JUST MET UP AT A LITTLE SENTRY POST ARRANGED AT THE TOP OF THE ROCKSLIDE...



No joke, this darkness will drive you nuts! You think you can hear or see all kinds of things... Here, just as you got here, I thought that...



HELP!! HELP!!



All right, I'm out of here! Keep the chopper... You know the instructions: In case of trouble, ring "Fat Louis"... But don't disturb him for nothing... He doesn't like that!

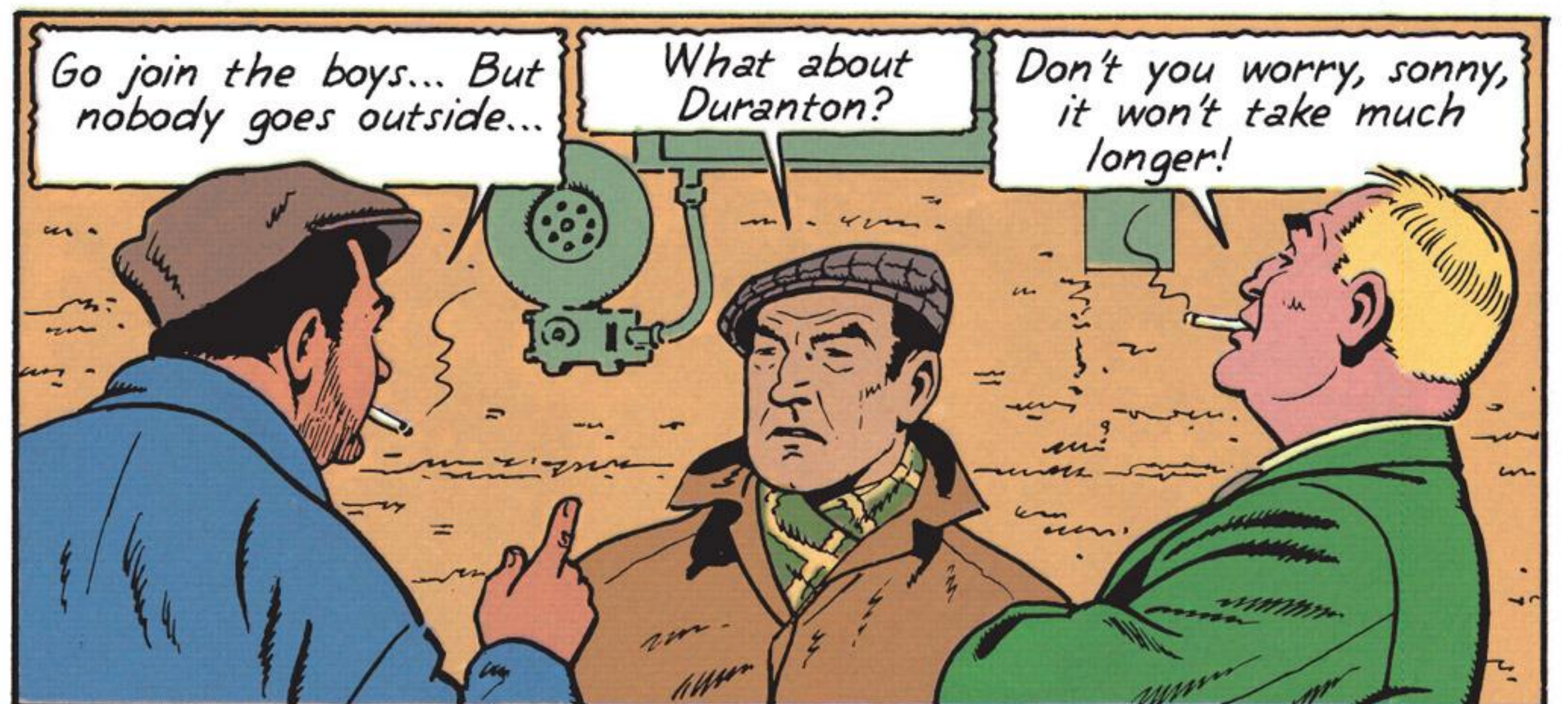
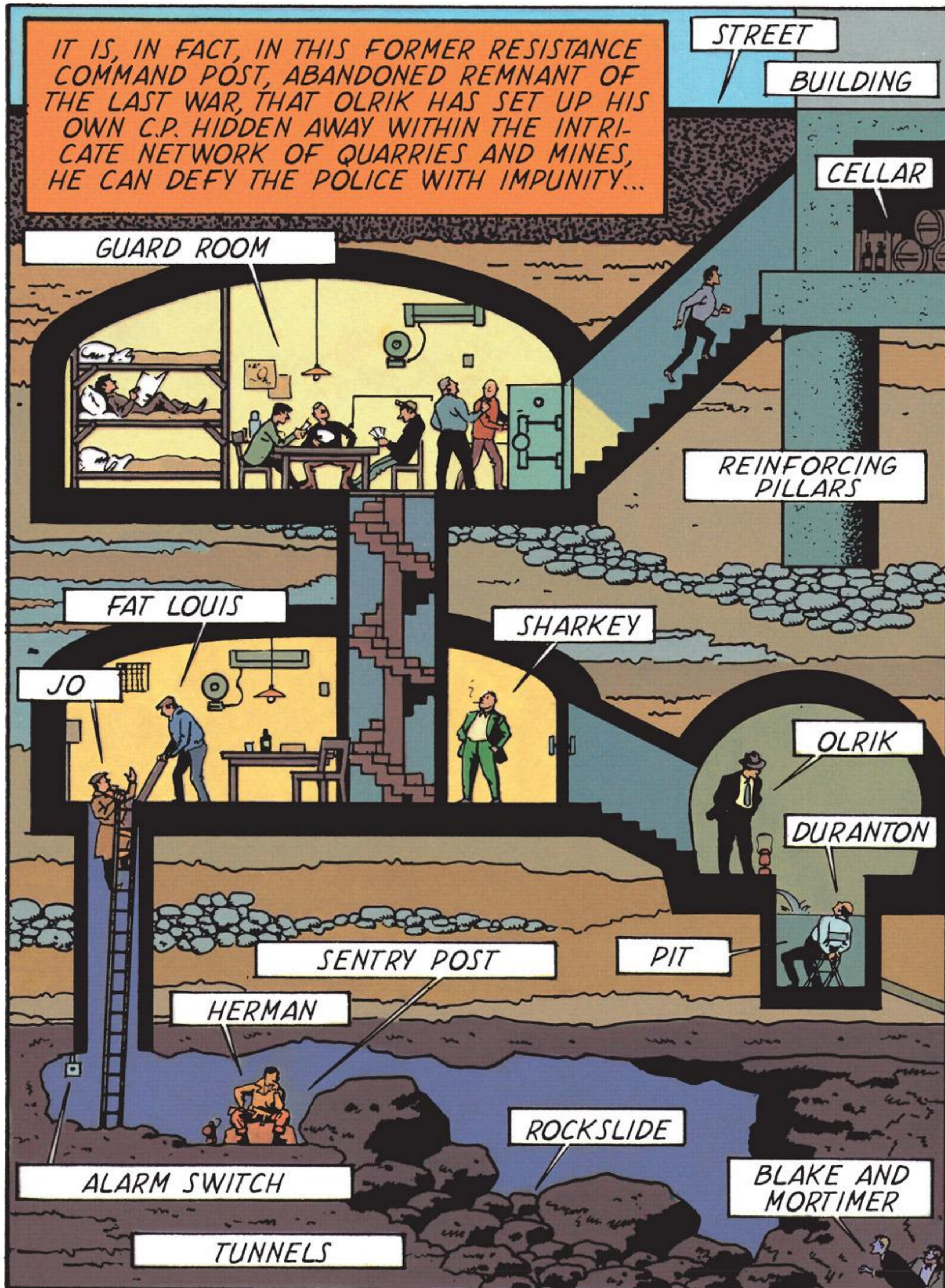


LEAVING HIS ACCOMPLICE, THE MAN HEADS TOWARDS AN OLD SERVICE WELL...

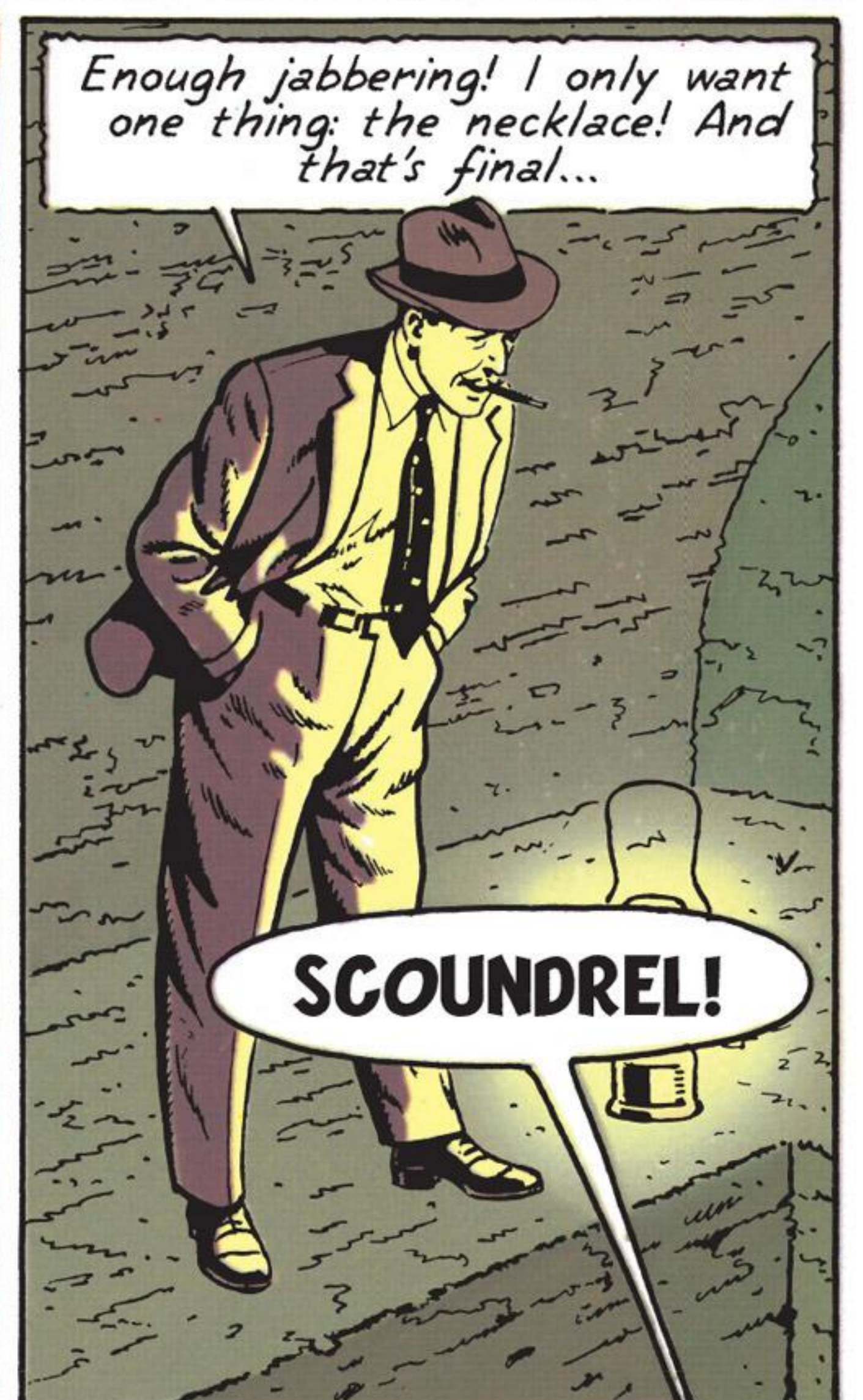


... AND, SMILING AT HIS OWN JOKE, HE CLIMBS UP TOWARDS OLRİK'S MYSTERIOUS HIDEOUT!!





INDEED, IN THE MEANTIME, TEETH CHATTERING AND UP TO HIS SHOULDERS IN WATER, THE JEWELLER IS NOT FEELING VERY BRAVE...



MEANWHILE, CROUCHING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE COLLAPSE, BLAKE AND MORTIMER ARE GETTING READY TO MOVE...



What a sorry job! Keeping watch in this damp hole, and against what?! Not even a cat would come down here!

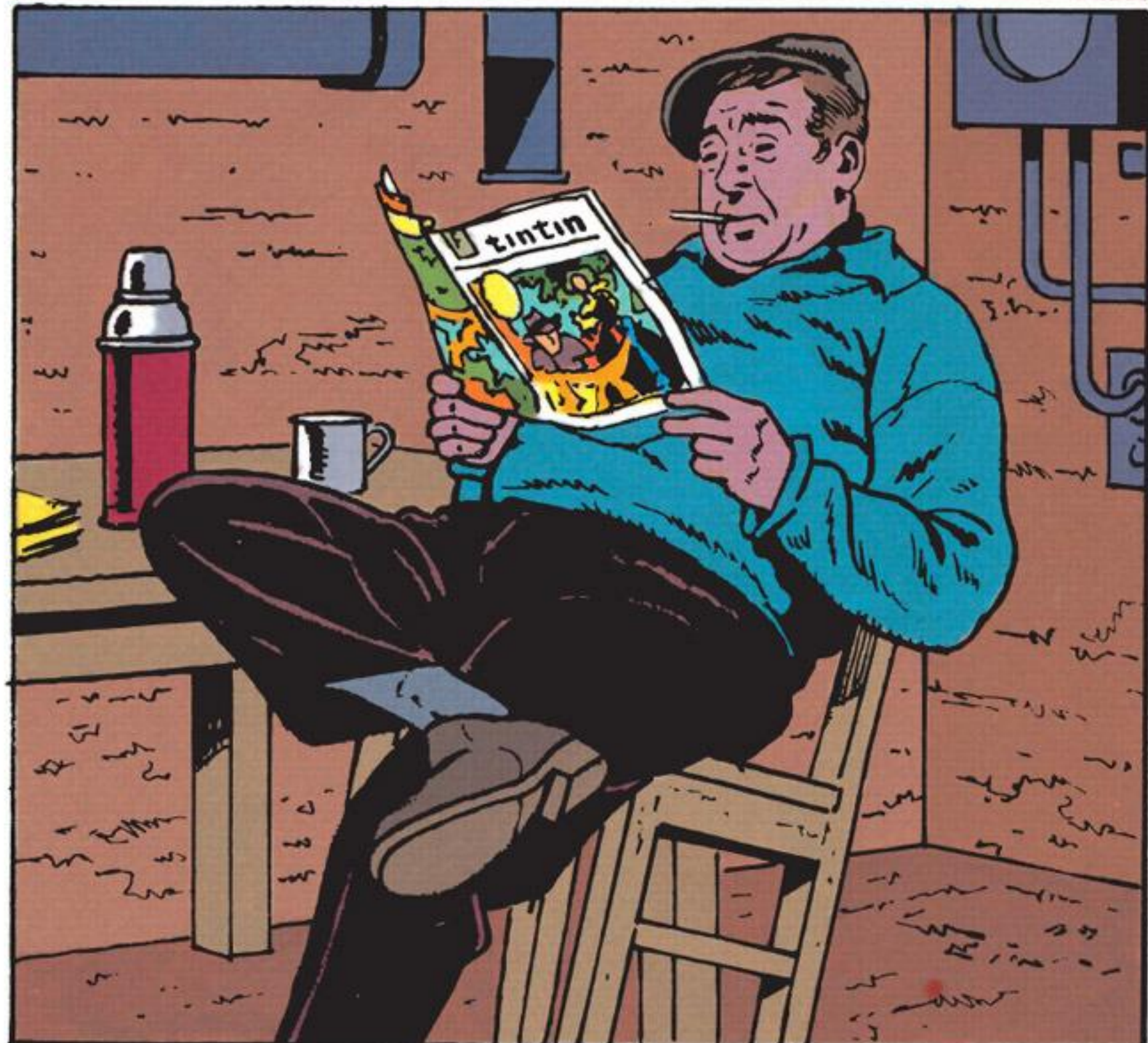


THE UNWARY MAN LEAVES HIS POST, LAMP IN HAND...





BUT WHILE FAT LOUIS GOES BACK TO HIS READING...



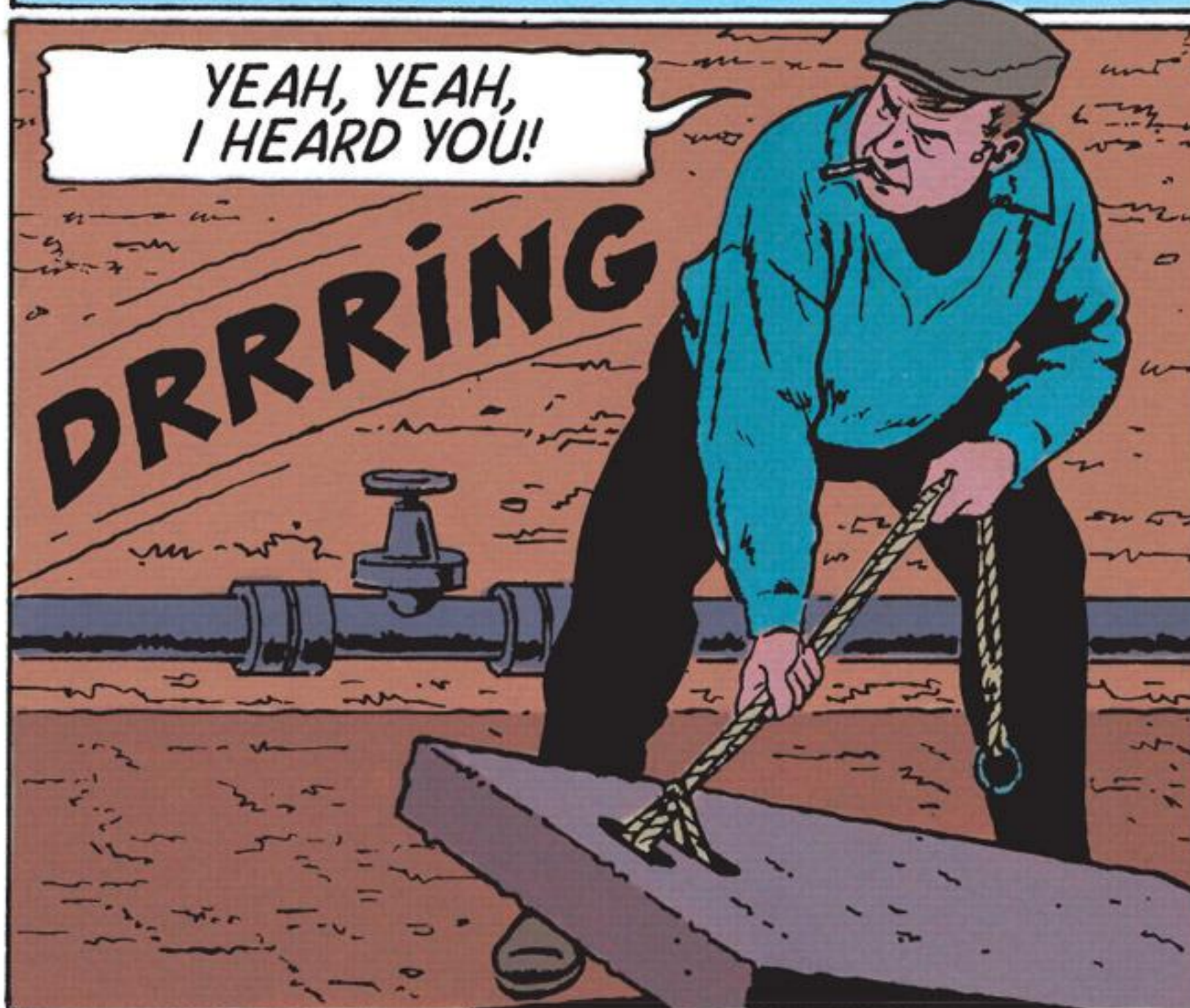
... BLAKE AND MORTIMER HAVE MADE THEIR WAY TO THE FOOT OF THE LADDER...



DRRRRRRING



GRUMBLING ALL THE WAY, THE MAN LIFTS THE TRAPDOOR.



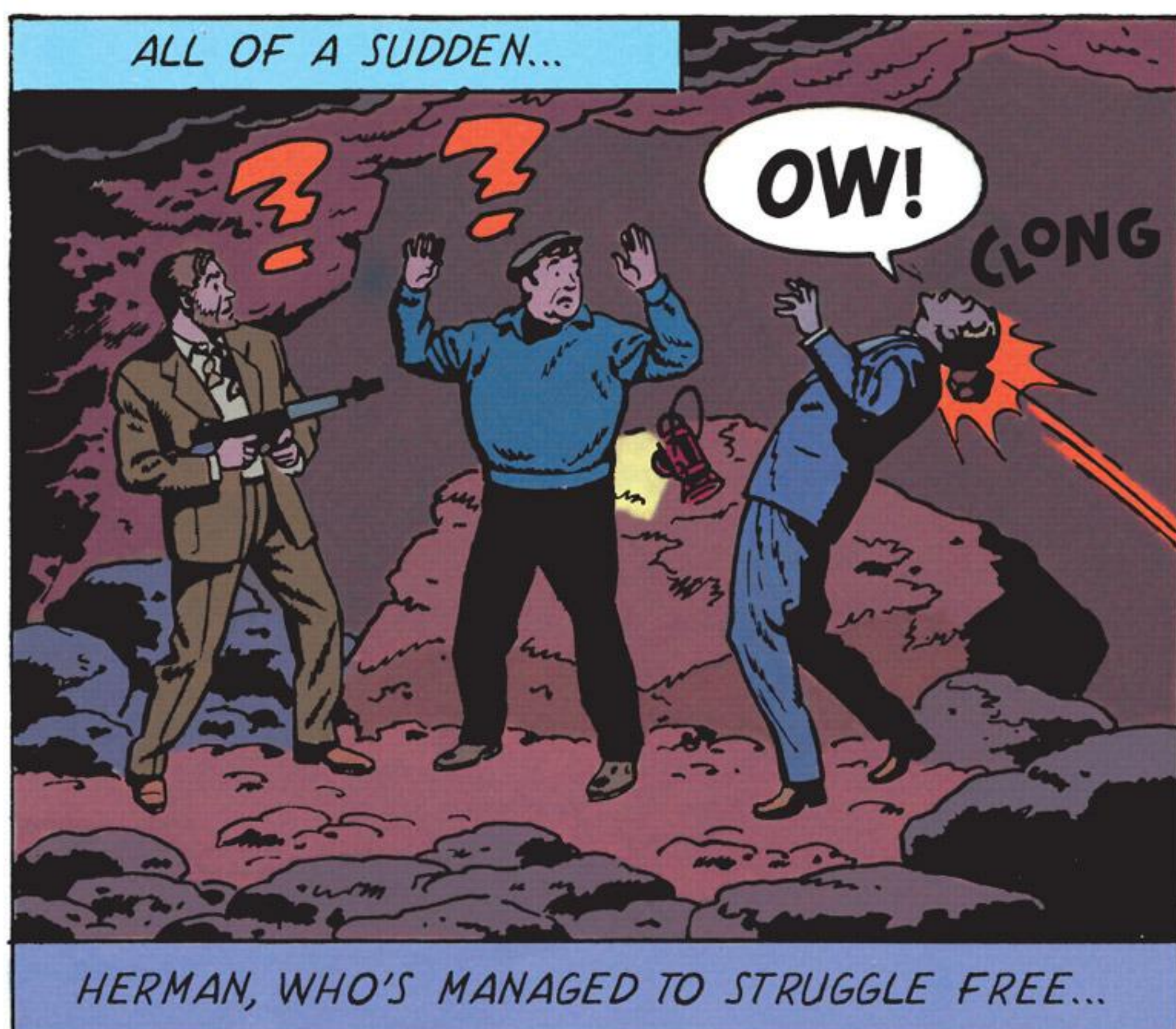
So? What's the problem, then?! What...? Speak up, dammit!



A VOICE, LOW BUT PRESSING, WHISPERS...



A look at what? Just say you're getting scared!



HOLDING ON TIGHT TO THE SUBMACHINE GUN, THE TWO ADVERSARIES TUMBLE DOWN THE ROCKSLIDE...



... AND WHILE A SAVAGE STRUGGLE FOR POSSESSION OF THE WEAPON BEGINS...



... HERMAN PICKS UP FAT LOUIS'S LUGER...



... AND RUSHES TO HIS ACCOMPLICE'S AID...



YOU'RE MINE, NOW!!



BUT AT THAT MOMENT...



AND WITH A DEAFENING COMMOTION, THE TUNNEL IS SUDDENLY FILLED WITH A HORDE OF POLICEMEN AND DOGS...



Here, old boy! By Jove! You certainly got here just in the nick of time!



Nice to see you, Pradier! But how did you manage to find us?

Thanks to this pipe you lost... our dogs' noses... and the technicians from the Quarry Inspection Service, whom we mobilised for the situation! Sorry!



Tell me, though, where did these two guys come from?

From dear Olrik's hideout...
... which is right above your head!



WHAT?



RENDERED TEMPORARILY SPEECHLESS, THE COMMISSIONER EVENTUALLY BLURTS OUT...

I'll be...! How on earth?!

Later! No time to lose! Just know that the whole gang is up there!

... Including the honourable Mr Duranton!

Blimey! What a catch that'd be!!!

Only if we can keep them bottled up in their hideout! But it probably has another exit...

... and since we don't know where it is any more than where we are...

Pardon me, gentlemen...

AN ENGINEER FROM THE QUARRY INSPECTION SERVICE CUTS IN ON THE CONVERSATION...

I think I can be of assistance... We are currently under the Saint Médard district, and I just recalled that during the war the Office of Projects was tasked with setting up a clandestine C.P. for the F.F.I.* The work was stopped after the Liberation and the access routes condemned... Maybe this is...

Where is the entrance located?!

It opened onto Calvin Street, I think... No! Les Postes Alley!!!

Good grief! That must be it!!

Hey! Bigot! Send an order to lock up the "Mouffe"*** and to close both ends of Les Postes Alley... Tell them we're waiting for the perimeter to be set up before we launch the assault!

OK, boss!

And now let's get up there before someone closes that trapdoor in our faces!

He's right! Three men to keep the prisoners, and everyone else with me. Forward!

A SHORT WHILE LATER, THE POLICE MOVE INTO THE LOWER GUARDROOM...

Probably the stairs leading up!

Intercom, air conditioning... It's nice and cosy here!

Let's lock the door to be on the safe side!

Listen!

Sounds like someone calling!?

THAT VOICE!?

HEAVENS! DURANTON! QUICK!!!

HELP! HELP ME! HEL...

IT'S HIM!!

AND THERE'S THE NECKLACE!!!

HE'S FAINTED!

GET HIM OUT OF THERE!

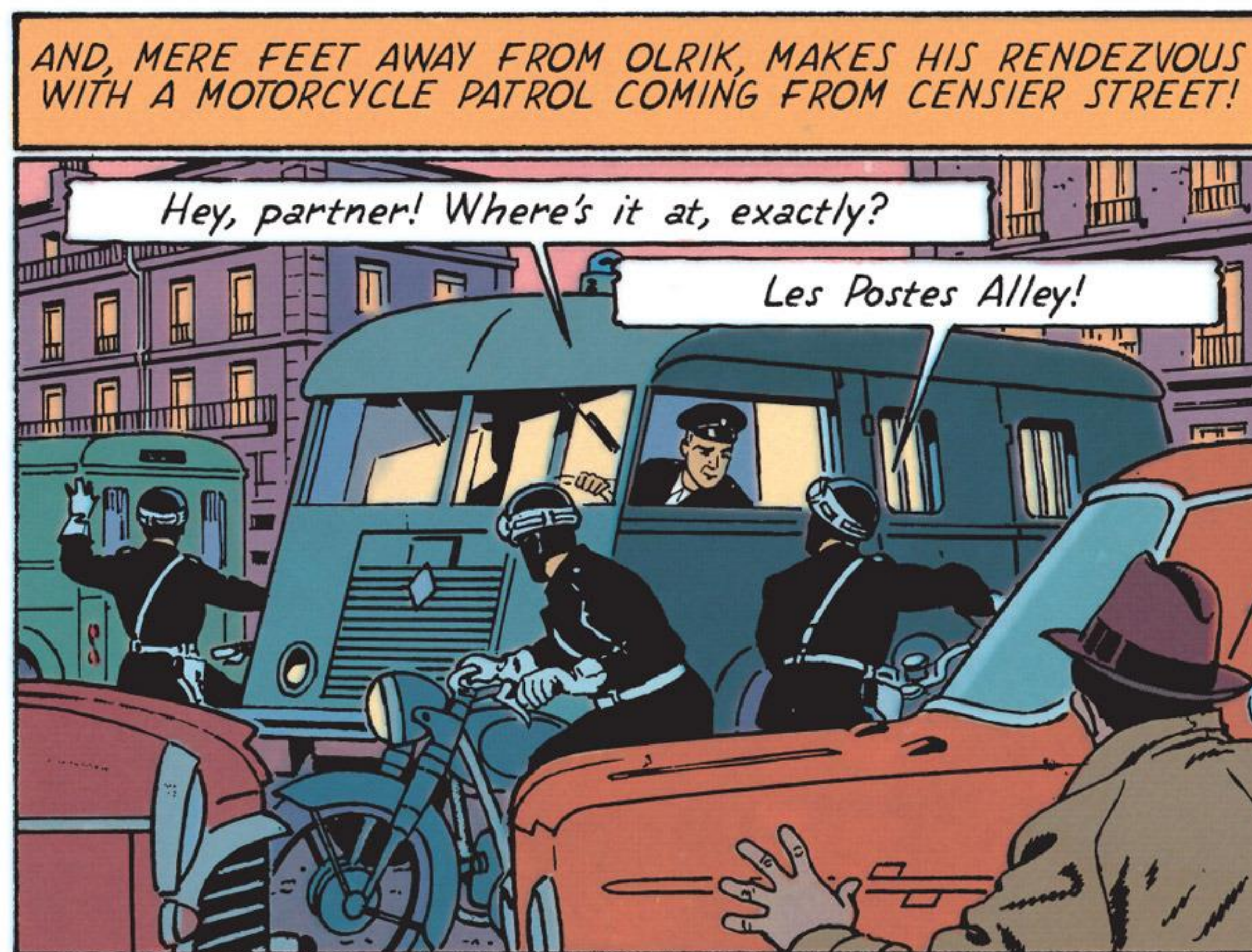
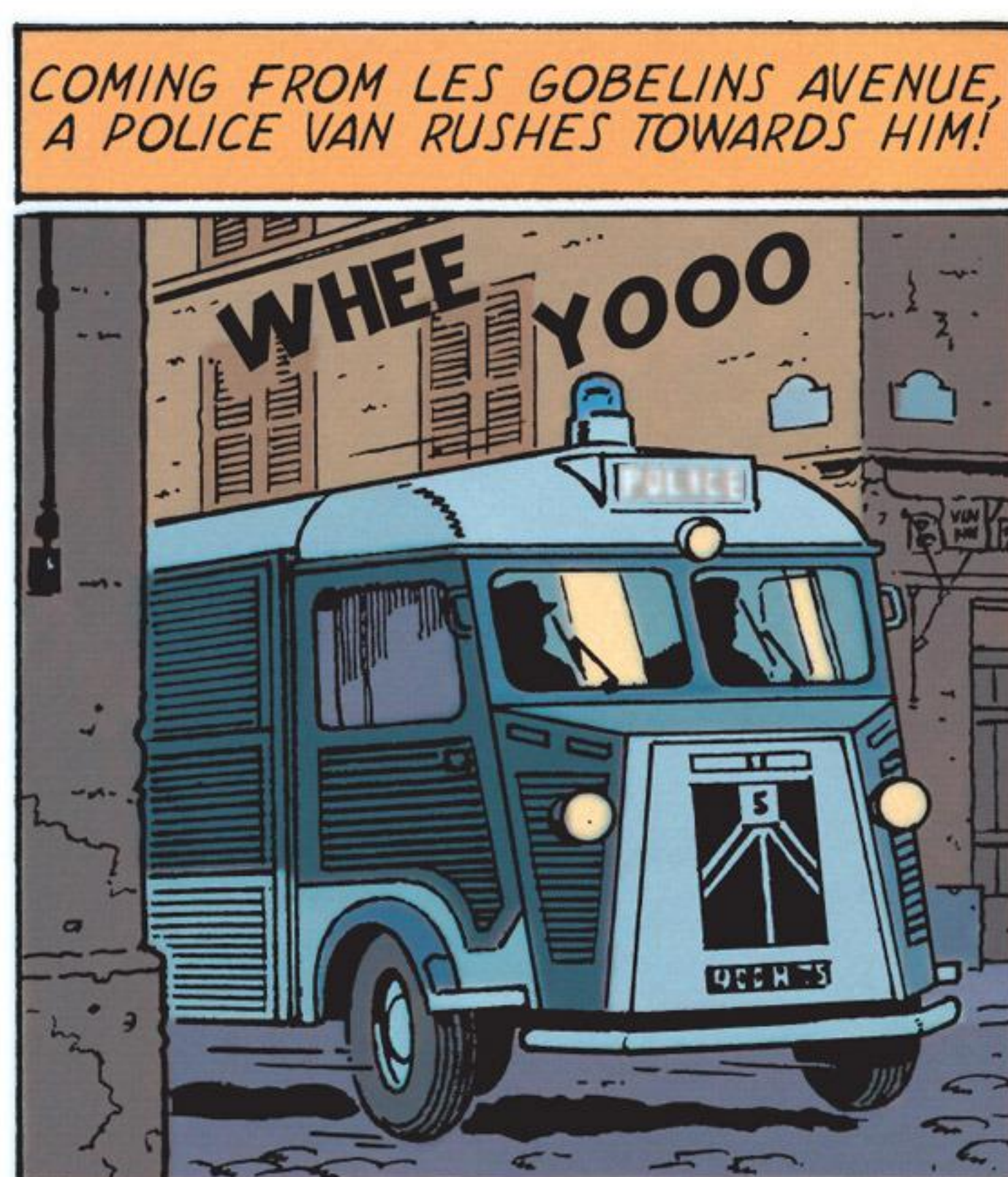
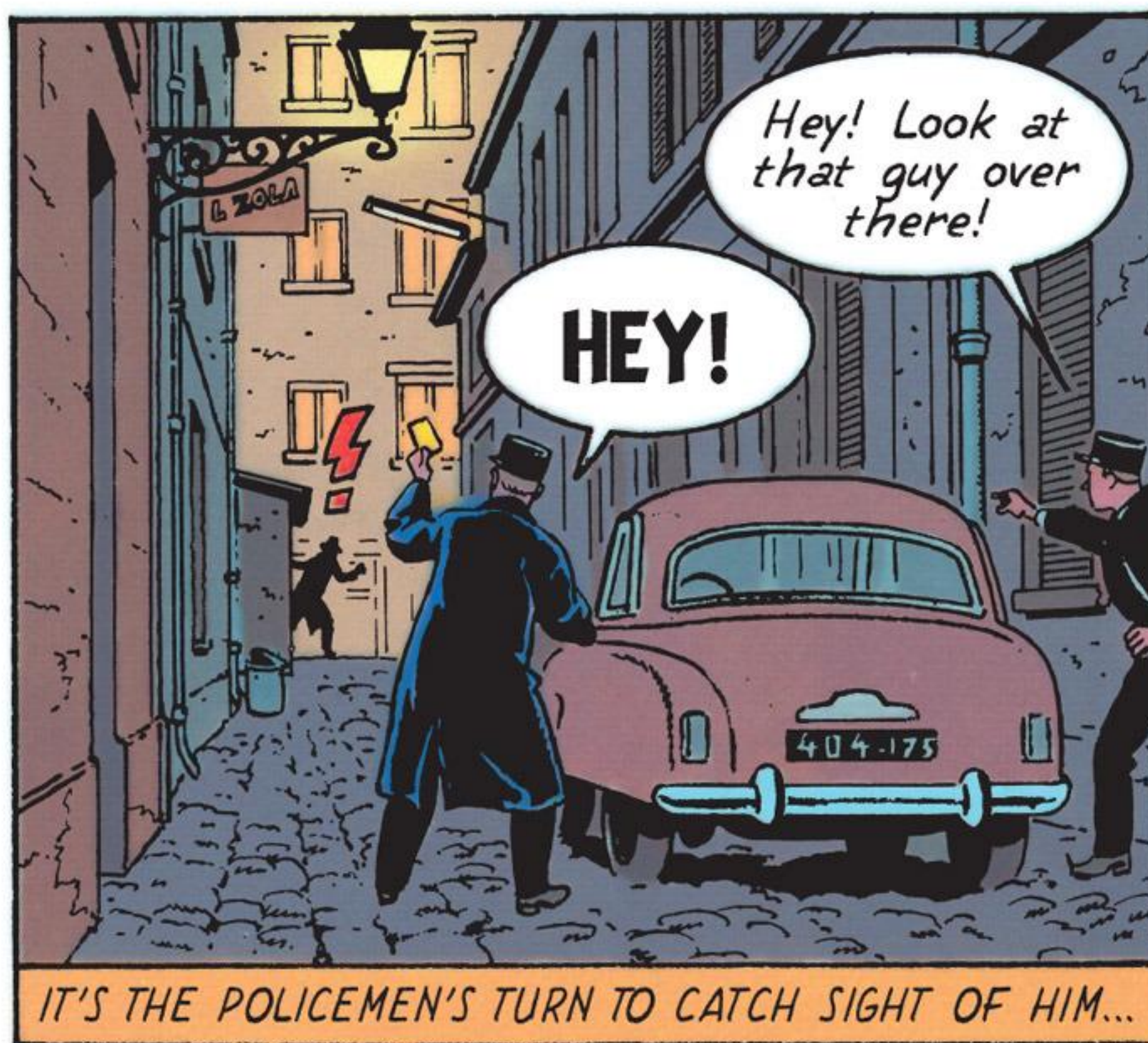
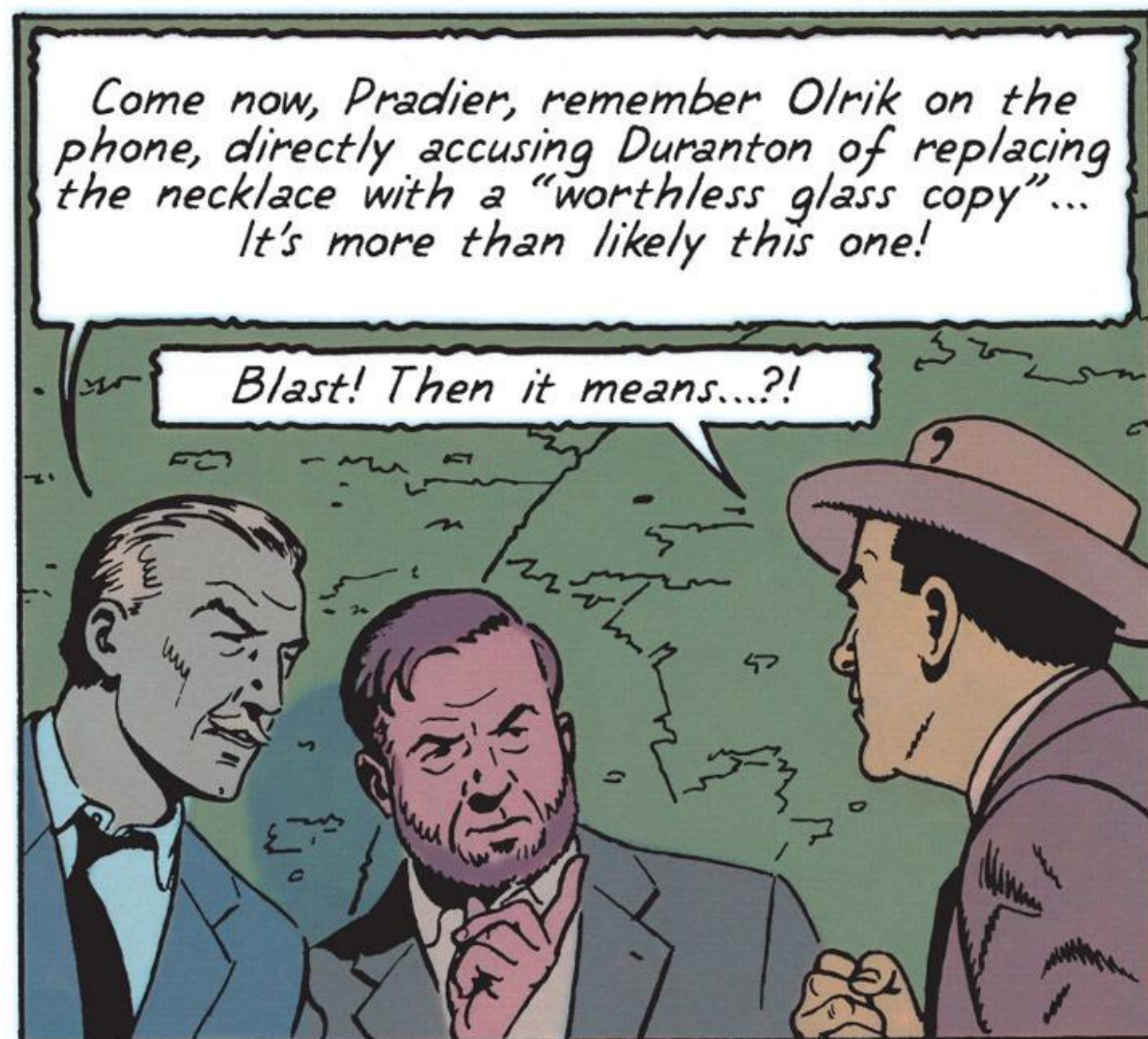
AND AS HIS MEN ATTEMPT TO REVIVE THE JEWELLER, PRADIER JUBILANTLY GATHERS THE NECKLACE...

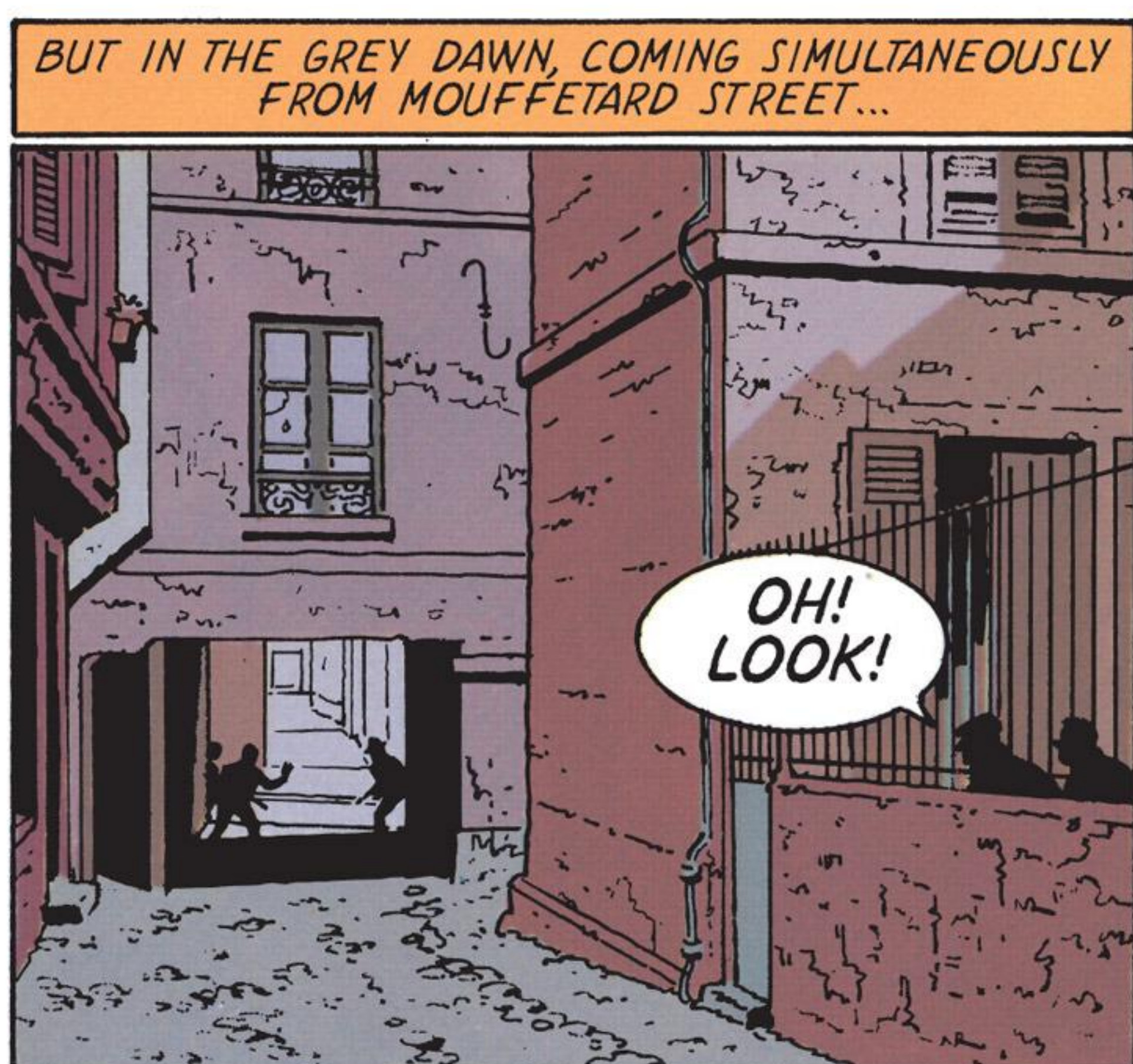
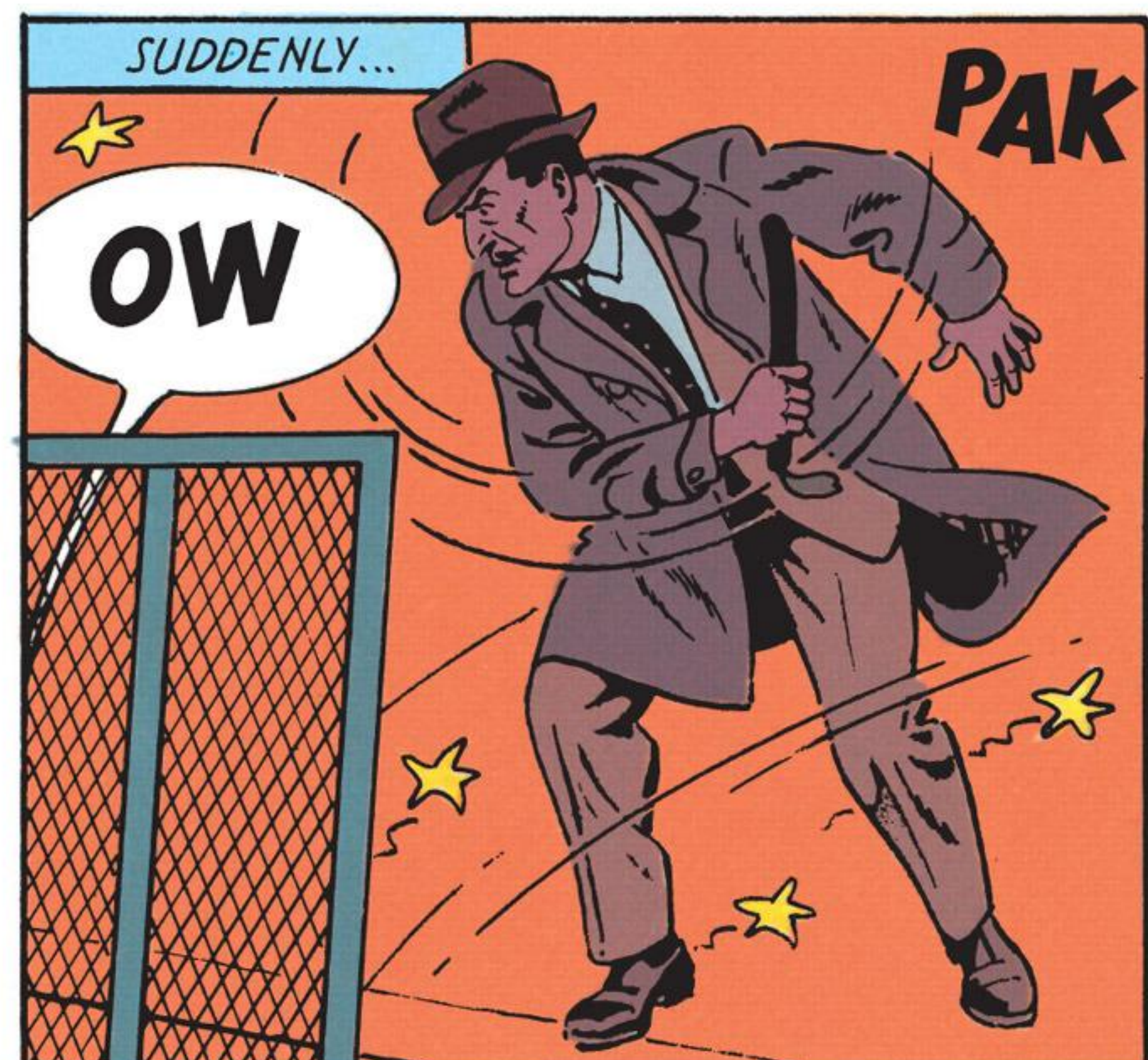
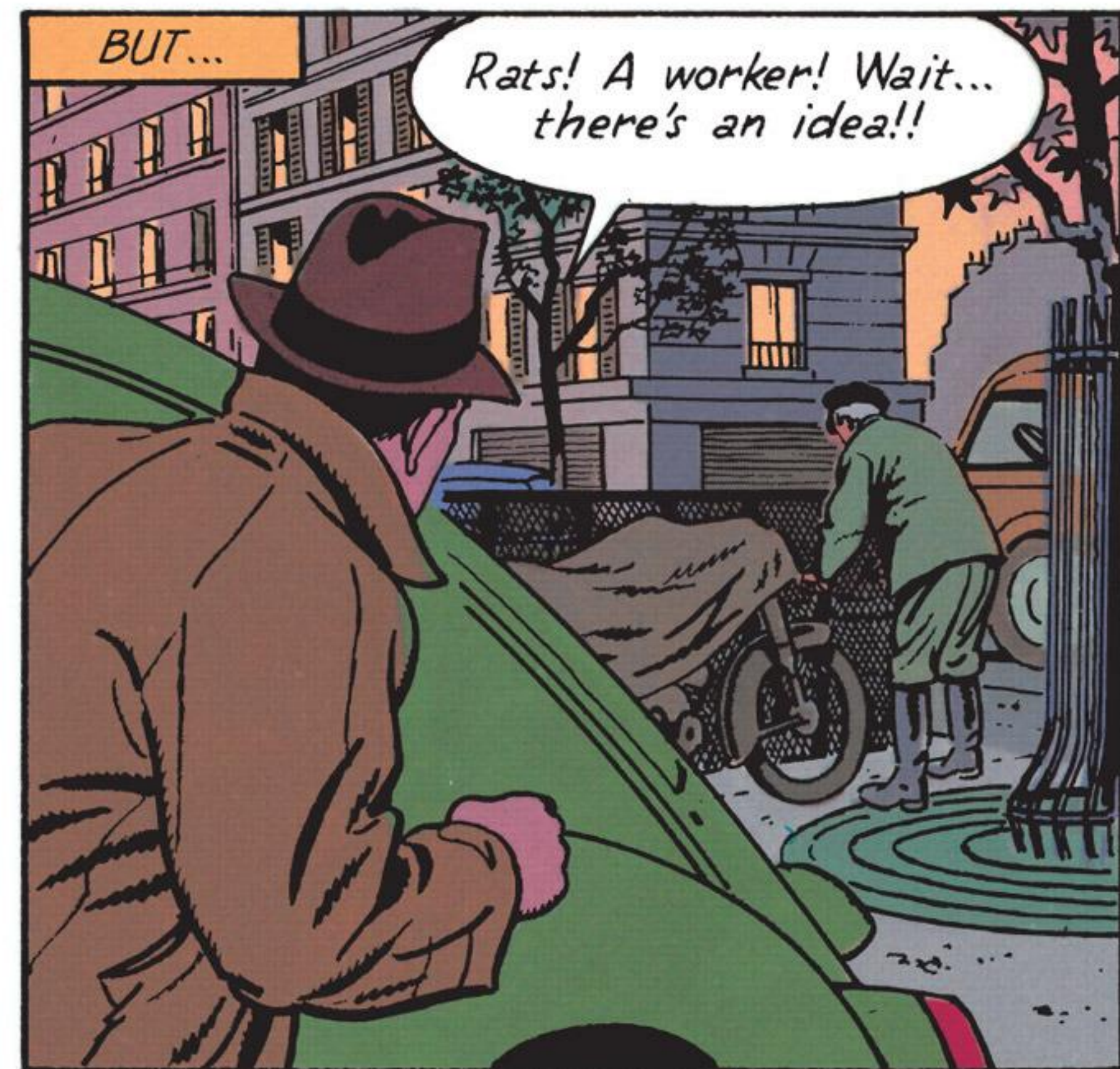
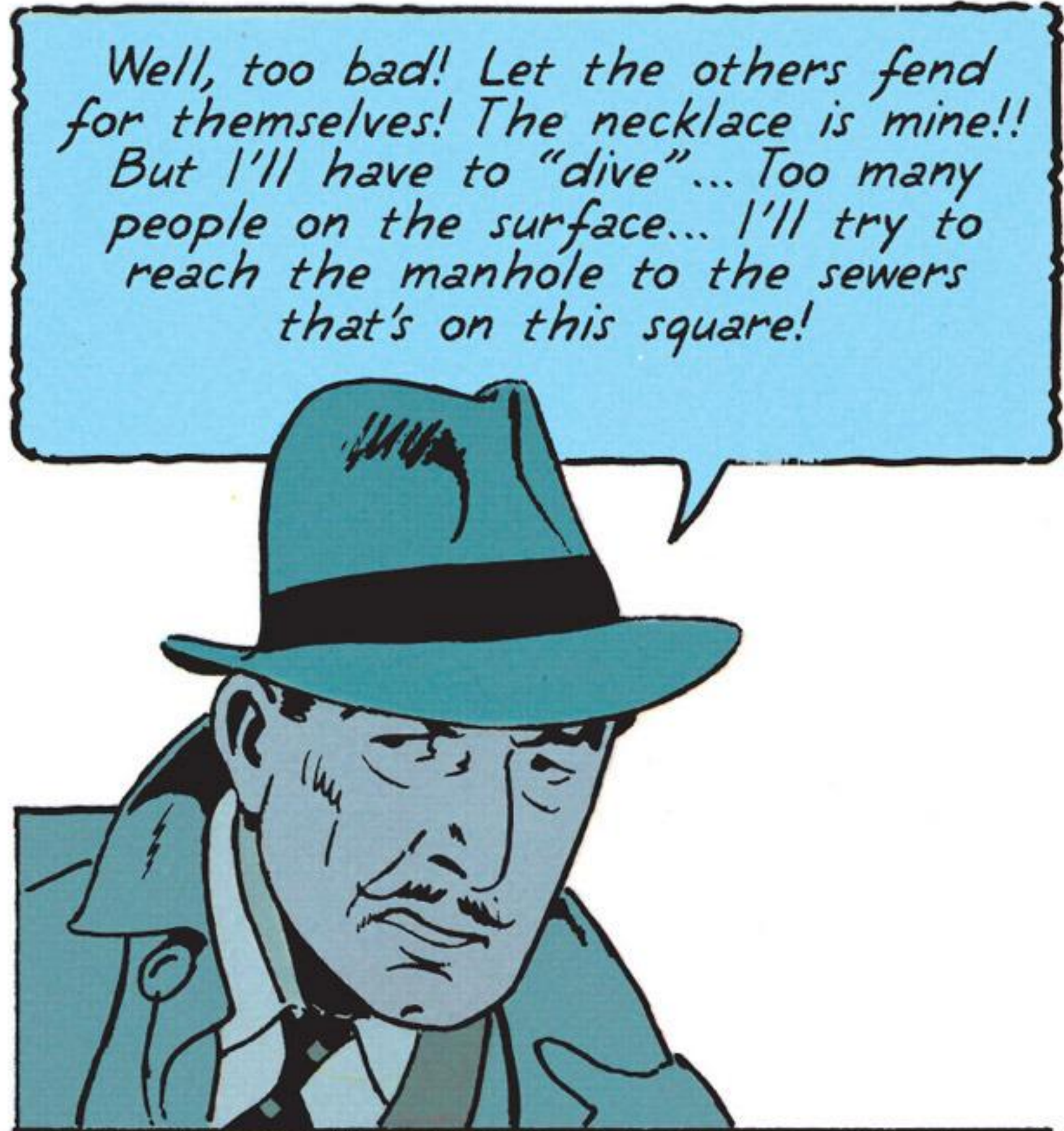
This time luck has changed sides! The hideout is breached, Duranton found, the necklace recovered...

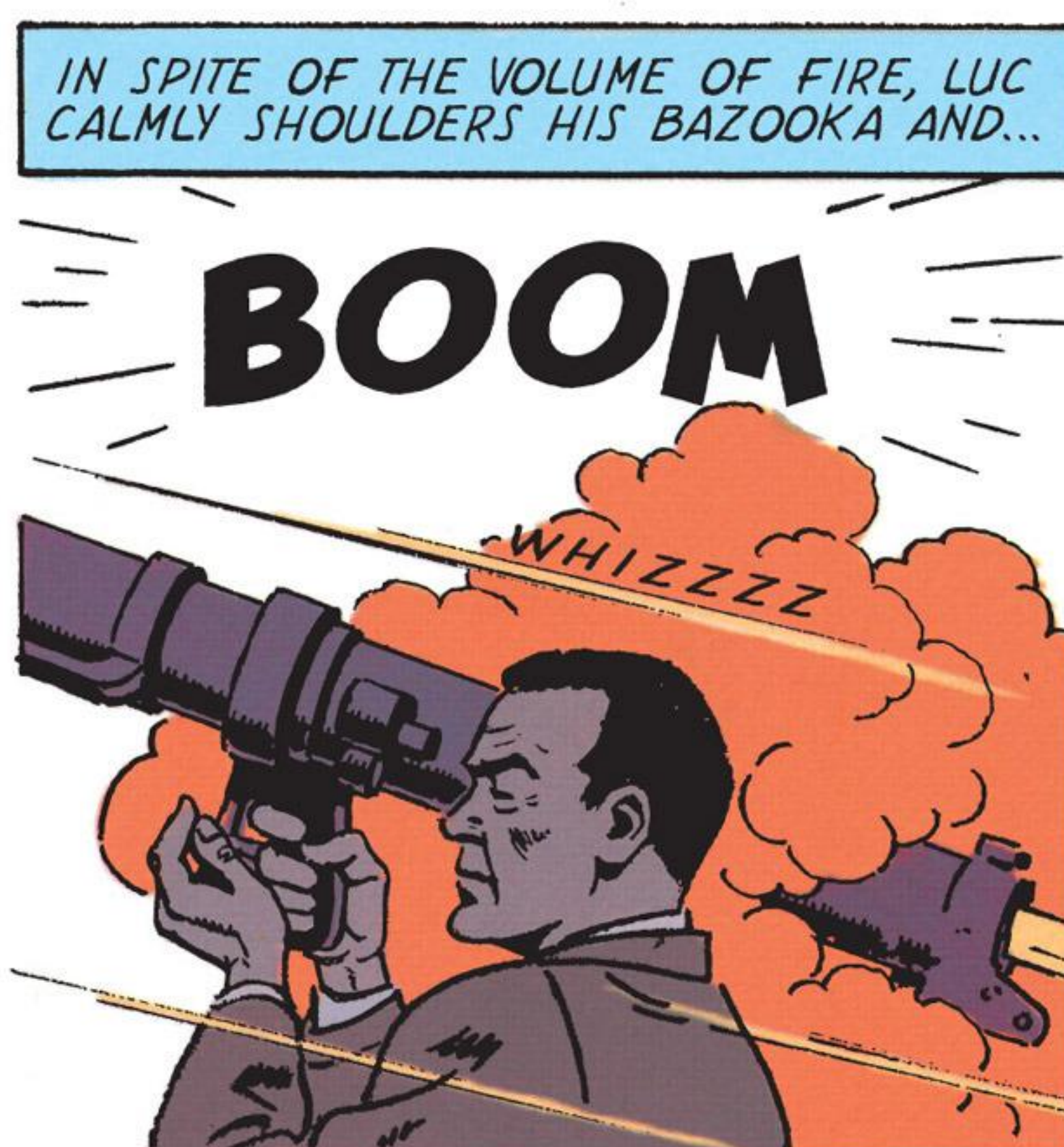
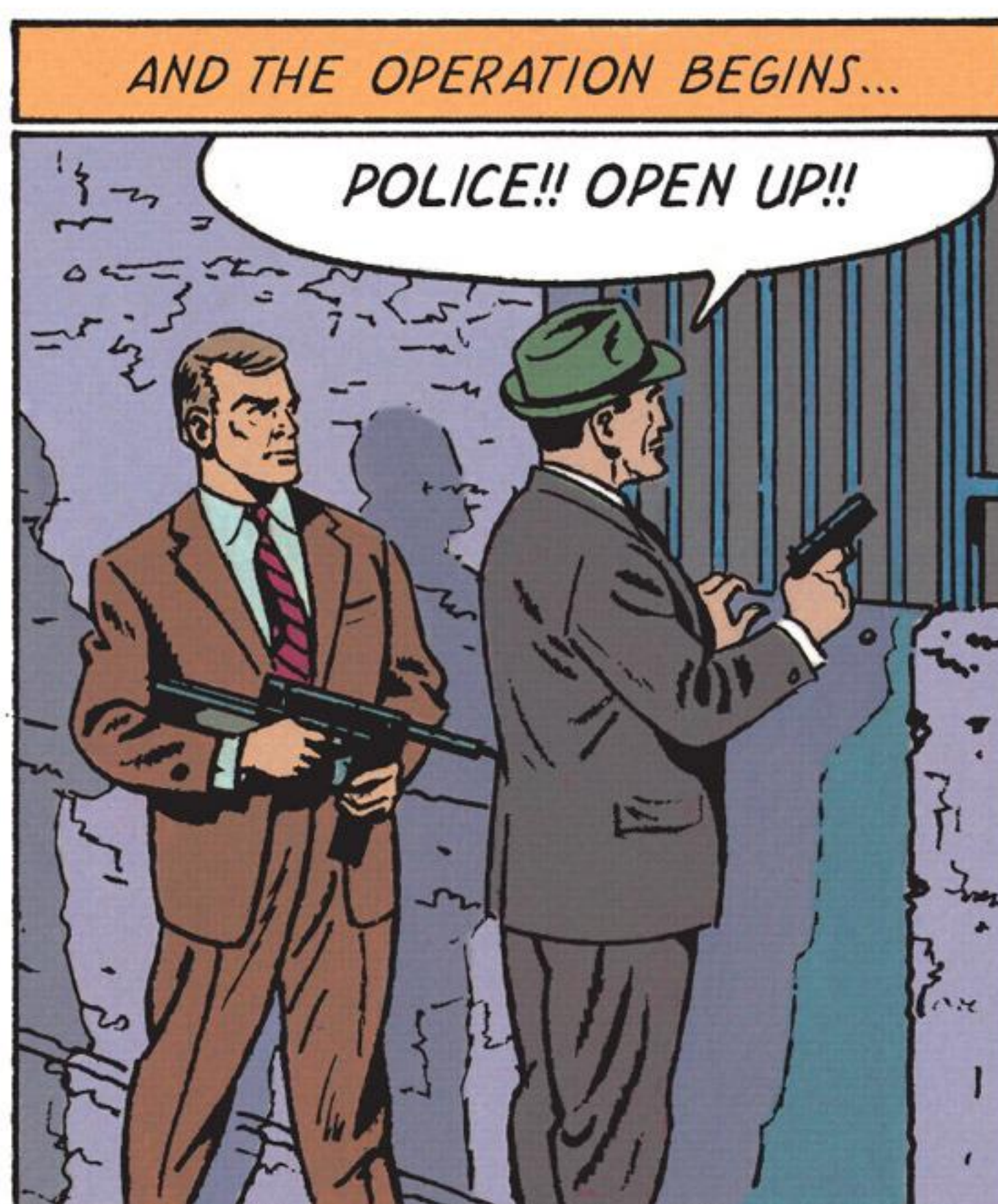
The necklace? Erm... Let's just say... a good copy of it!!!

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

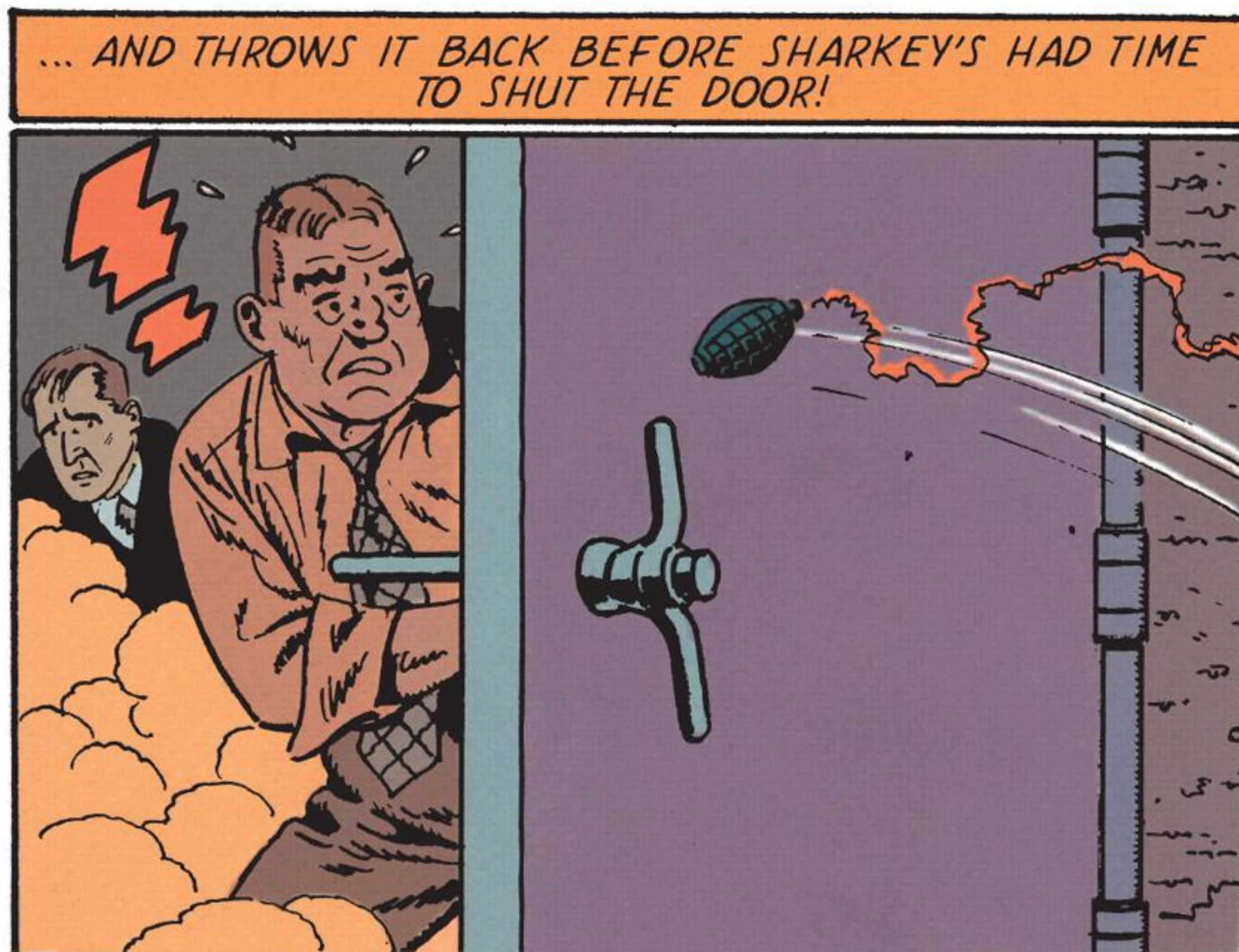
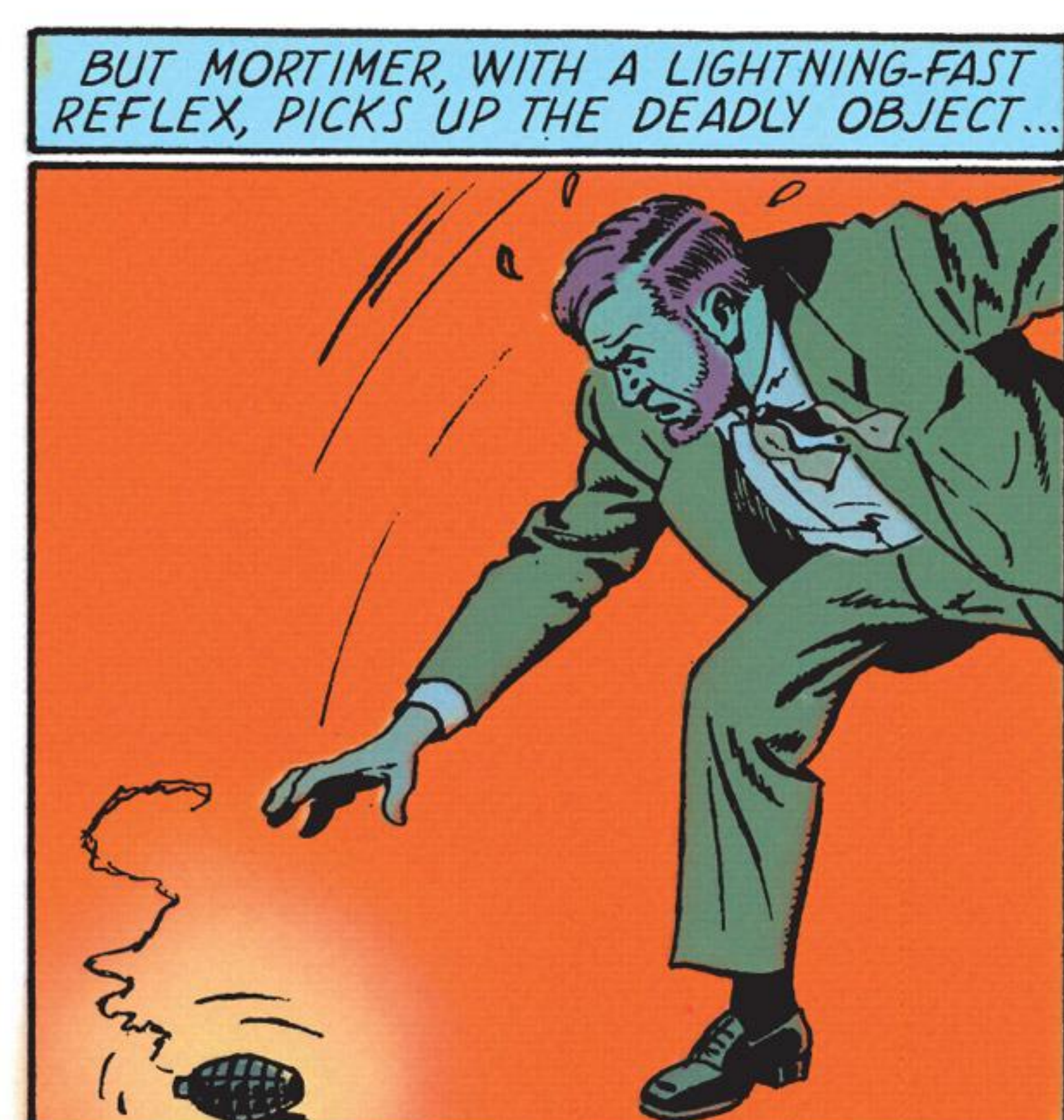
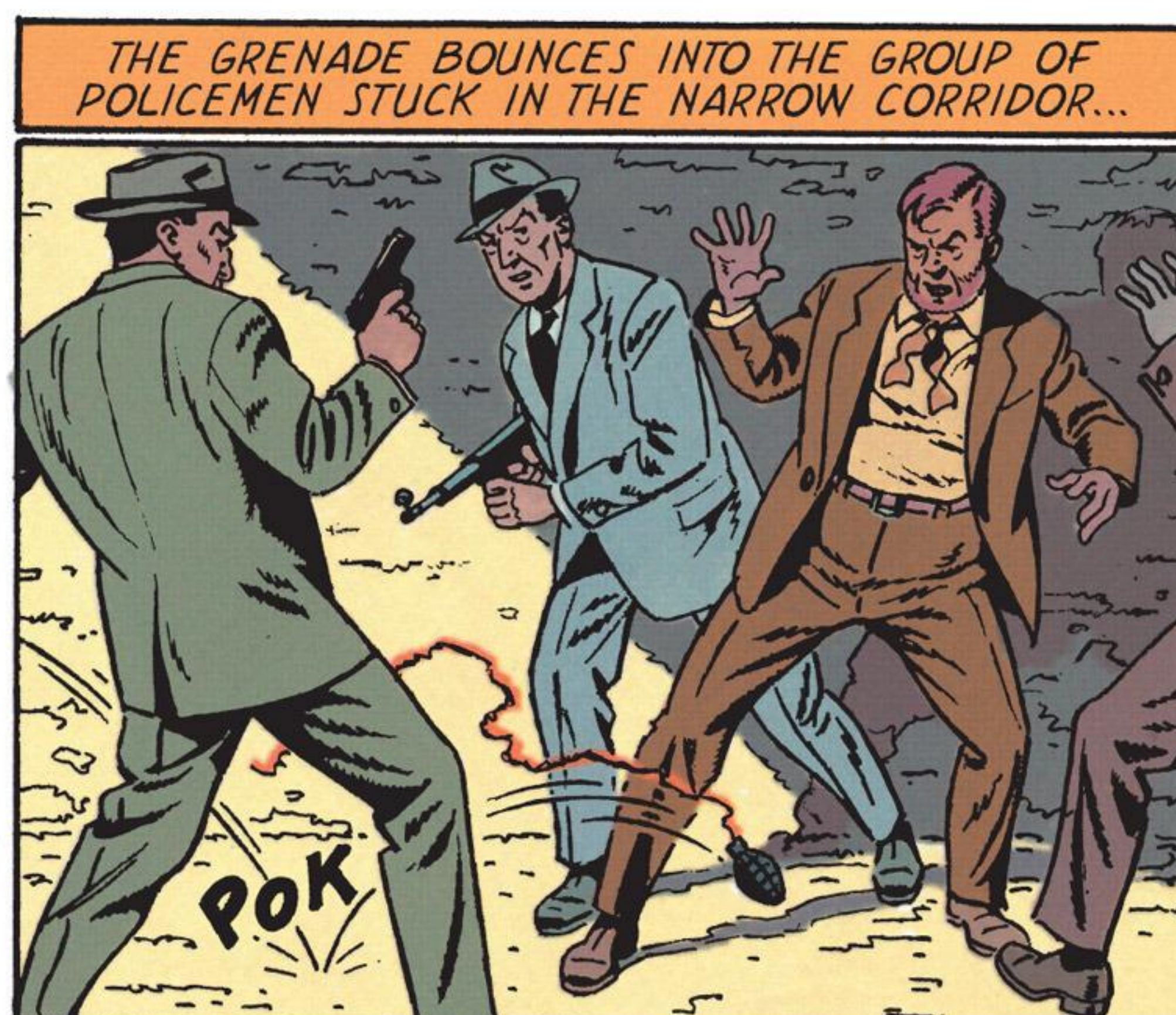
*FORCES FRANÇAISES DE L'INTÉRIEUR-FRENCH FORCES OF THE INTERIOR: THE RESISTANCE
 **NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRED ON MOUFFETARD STREET

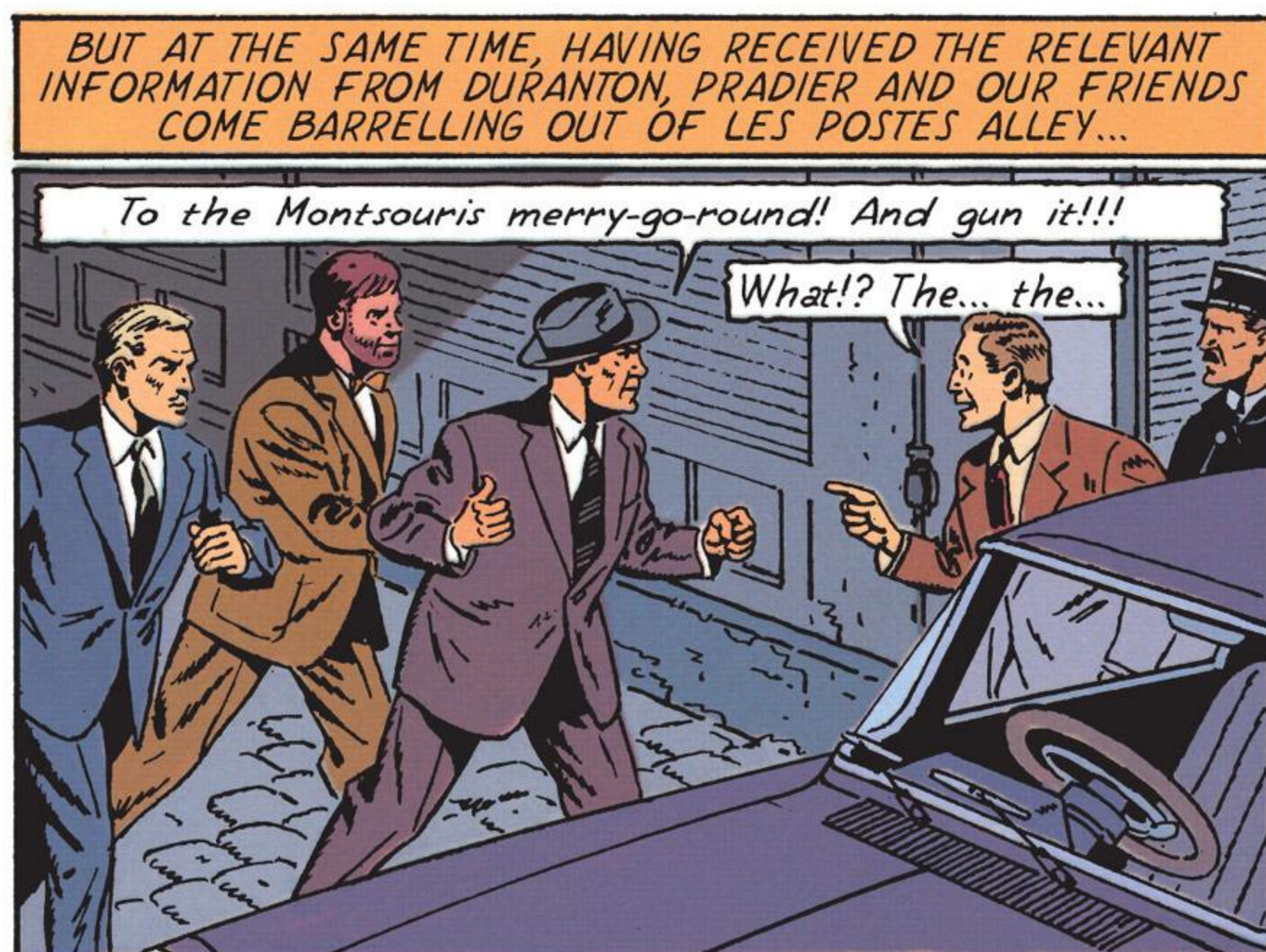






ONE BY ONE, THE ARMoured SHUTTERS ARE BLASTED!







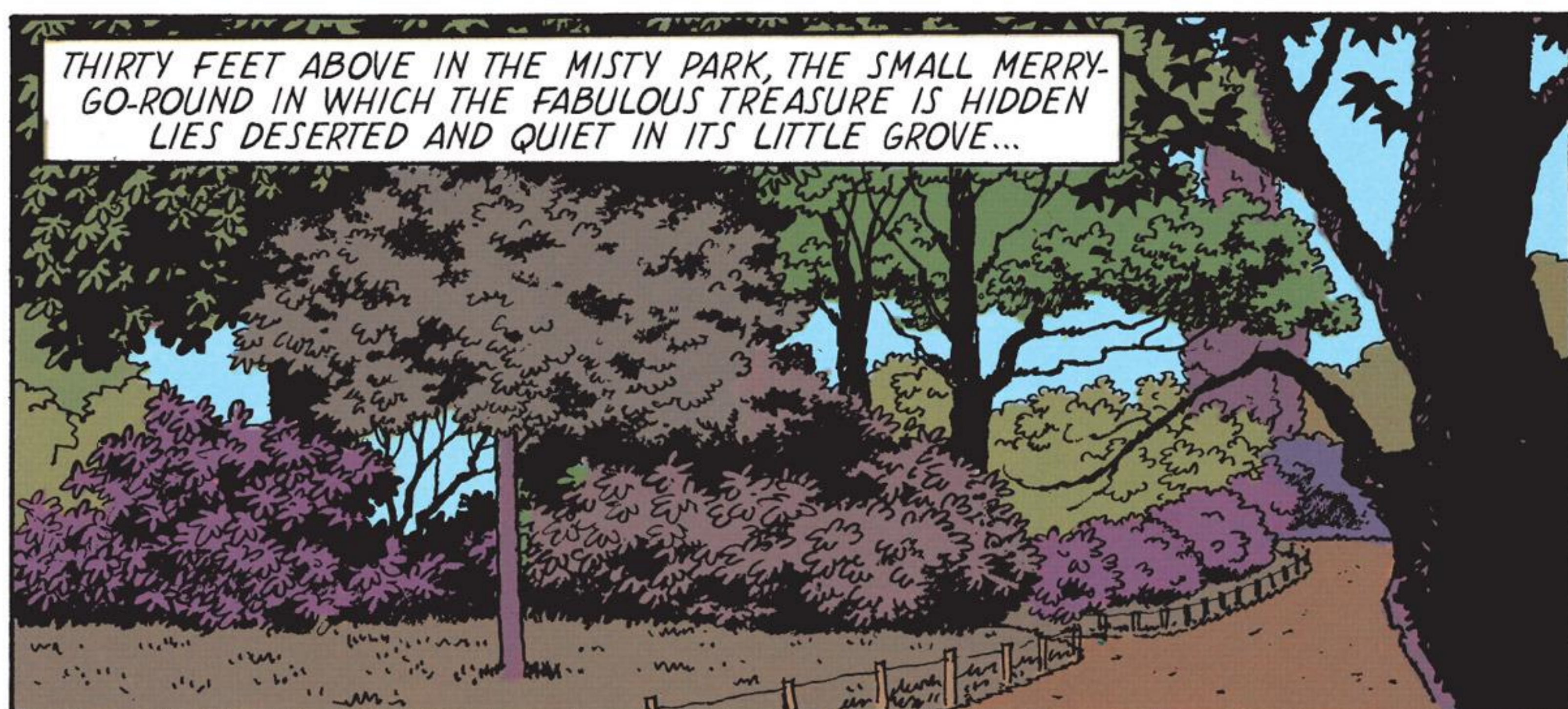
Montsouris Park!
At last!!



And now, I must find an exit
ladder, quick!



Ah, this will do me fine!



THIRTY FEET ABOVE IN THE MISTY PARK, THE SMALL MERRY-
GO-ROUND IN WHICH THE FABULOUS TREASURE IS HIDDEN
LIES DESERTED AND QUIET IN ITS LITTLE GROVE...



UNTIL OLRİK POPS OUT OF THE BUSHES...

Everything
looks normal...
Here I go!



PRUDENTLY, OLRİK SIDLES INSIDE THE
MERRY-GO-ROUND'S ENCLOSURE...



Here's the red and white suspended bench!



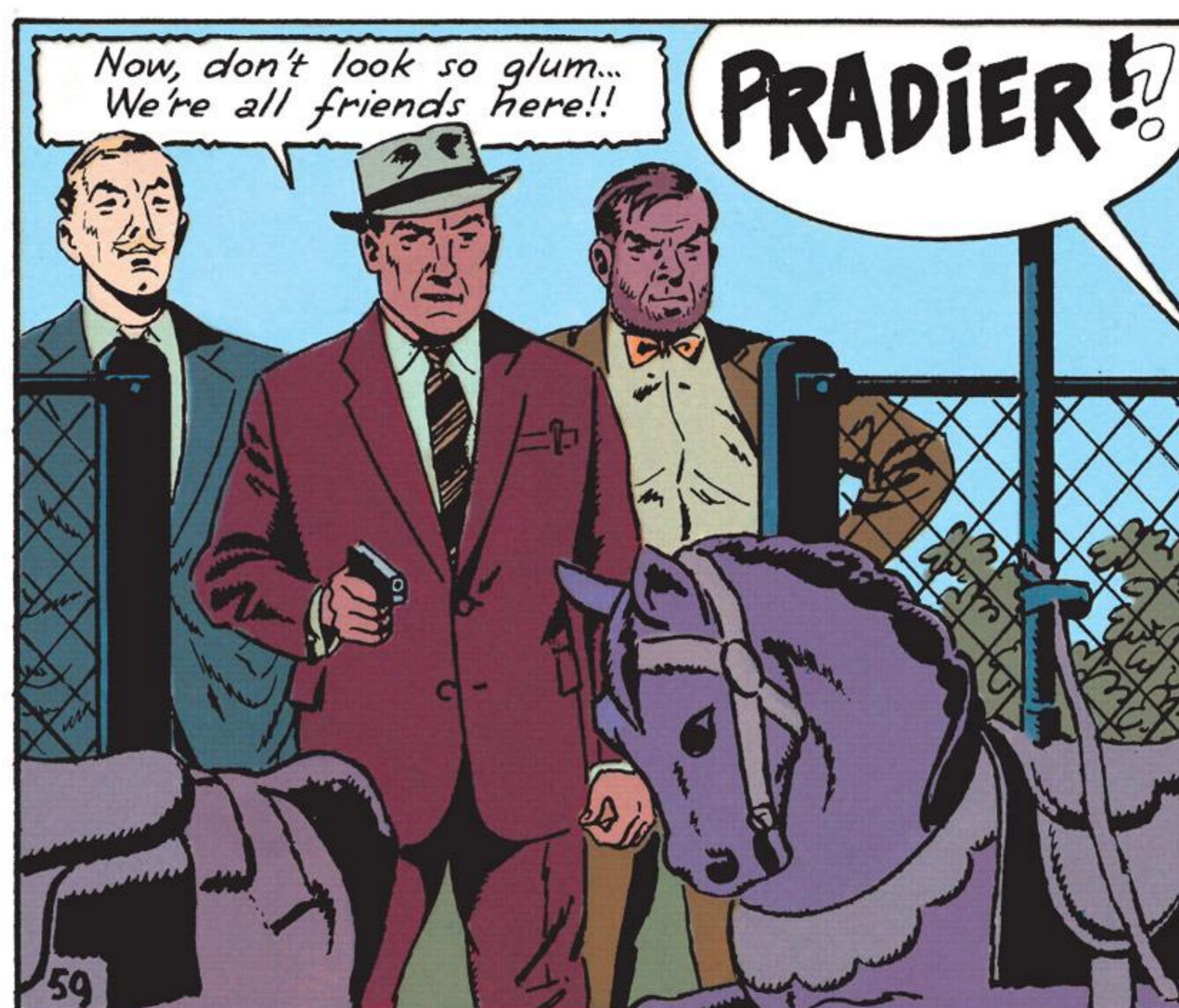
... Let's see... Ah! A bag!?!



VICTORY!!!
I HAVE IT!!!



GOOD MORNING!!!



Now, don't look so glum...
We're all friends here!!

PRADIER!?

TEMPORARILY STARTLED, OLRİK HAS ALREADY REGAINED HIS COMPOSURE...

The dear commissioner with our good friends Blake and Mortimer! What a pleasant surprise! Please pardon this outfit, but I had no way to know...

Enough small talk! Put your hands up and get out of there!

Good old Pradier! Always with the funny jokes!

I said: Hands up! Let go of that pole... NOW!!

BUT INSTEAD OF OBEYING, WITH AN ABRUPT GESTURE OLRİK VIOLENTLY PUSHES THE MERRY-GO-ROUND FORWARD, AND...

HUNH!

BANG OUCH!

THEN, WITH A PRODIGIOUS LEAP HE JUMPS OVER THE FENCE...

... LANDS ON A POLICE OFFICER...

OOF!

OW

... BOWLS ANOTHER TWO OVER...

... AND IN SPITE OF PRADIER'S CALLS...

STOP HIM, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!

... DASHES THROUGH THE UNDERGROWTH TOWARDS A SMALL WATER SERVICES PAVILION...

BANG BANG

... INTO WHICH HE DIVES...

BANG

PRADIER SIGNALS HIS MEN TO TEMPER THEIR ENTHUSIASM...

Watch it! Let's be careful! That devil is a good shot! Surround the shack first!



STEP BY STEP, WITH INFINITE CARE, THE POLICEMEN CONVERGE ON THE SMALL BUILDING...

Trapped in there, he can't escape us!



I've got a bad feeling about this lack of reaction!

What on earth could he be plotting?



FINALLY, ONE LAST DASH BRINGS PRADIER LESS THAN 40 FEET FROM HIS TARGET...



SURRENDER, OLRİK! YOU'RE DONE FOR THIS TIME!

HIS WARNING HAVING REMAINED UNANSWERED, THE COMMISSIONER SHOUTS...



FORWARD!

... A SECOND LATER HE BURSTS THROUGH THE DOOR, BUT...



EMPTY!

CRACK

Blast it! An access shaft! Quick!!



SOON AFTER, THEY ARE DOWN IN THE SEWERS...



Which one of those tunnels did he take?

Anyway, he's got an enormous lead!

Yes, we can forget it!

LOOK... THERE!!

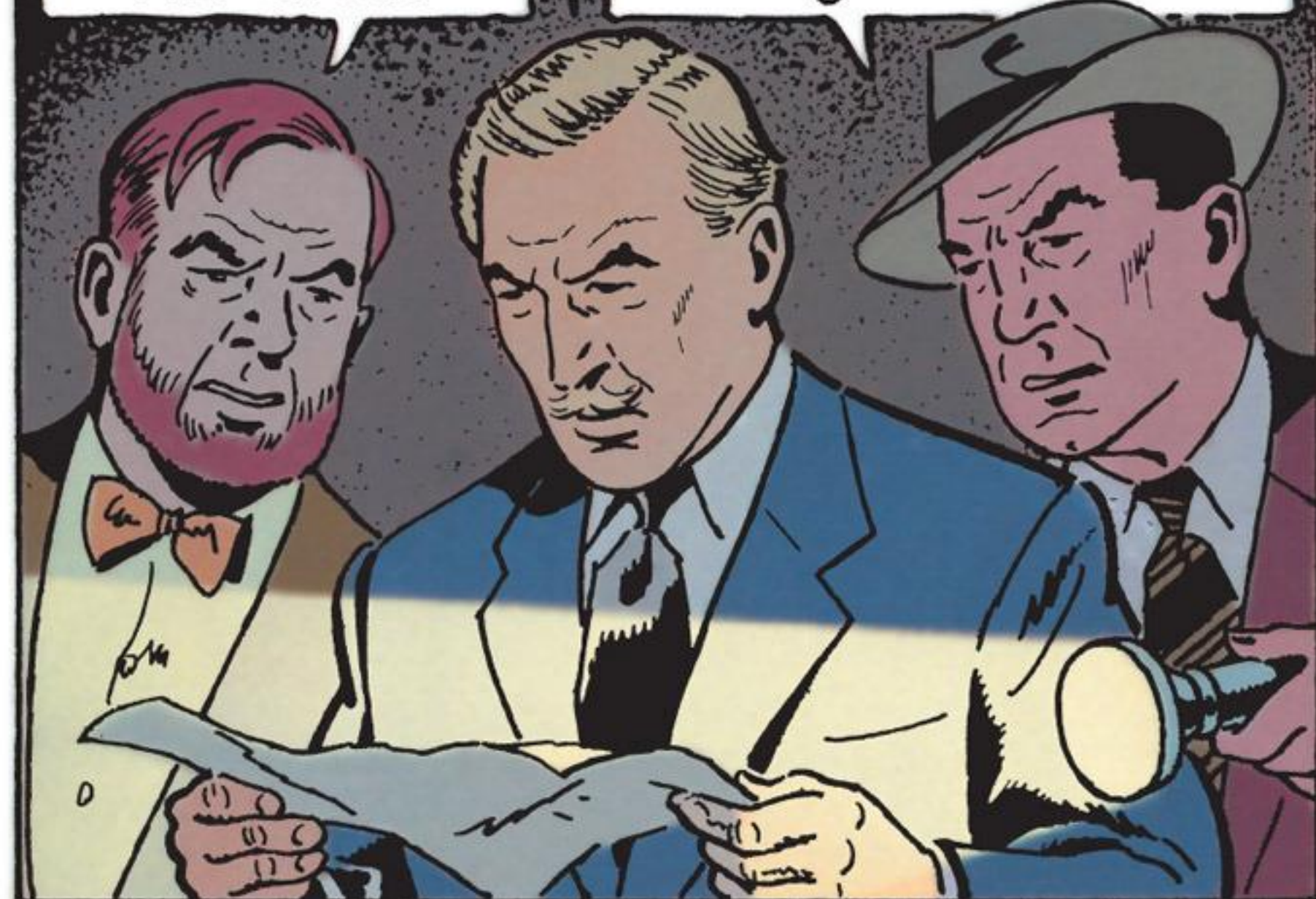
WHAT? A NOTE!?!



Goodbye and thank you! I leave Duranton's excellent copy to you... Cynically yours... Orlık!!

The cheek!

He's got some nerve!



JUST THEN, FROM THE SHAFT'S ENTRANCE, A VOICE CALLS THE COMMISSIONER...



Boss! The journalists are here!!

Of course!

Bah! Better get that part over with right now!

True! Let's climb!

AND 15 MINUTES LATER...

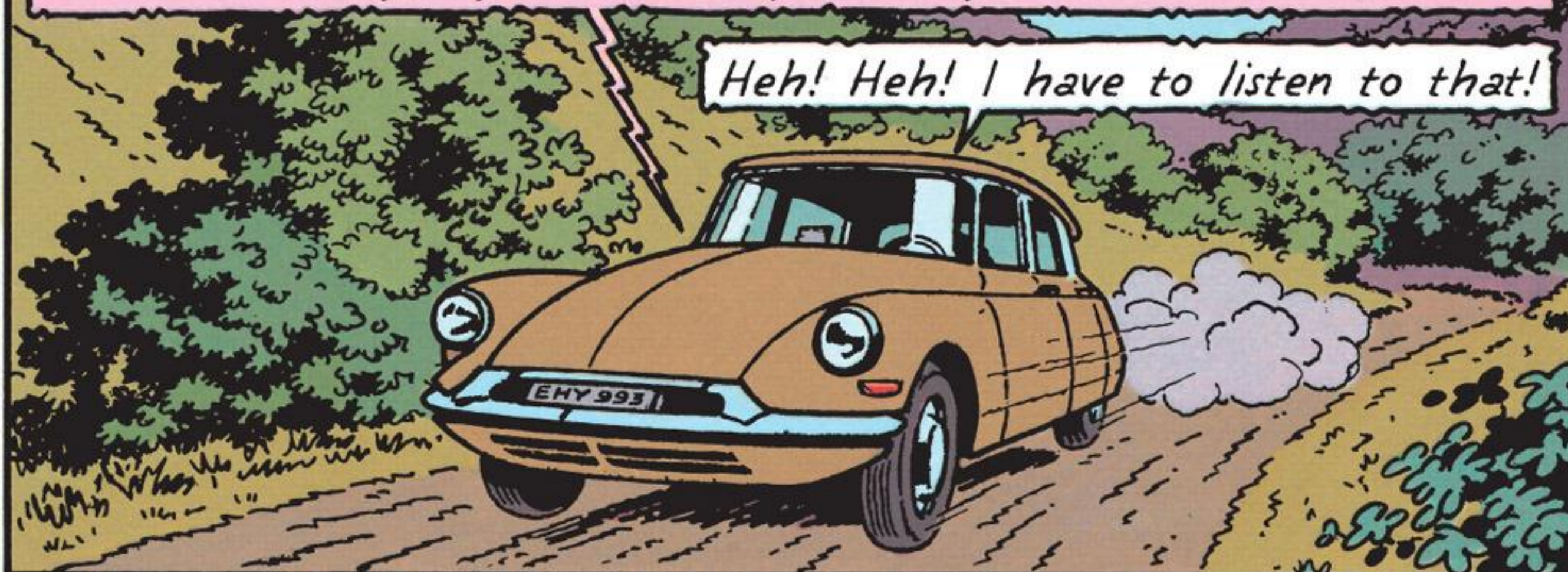


Hello!... On three columns! Manhunt in Montsouris Park! Orlık escapes his pursuers! Commissioner Pradier and his British friends will give a full account tonight during a special broadcast on the O.R.T.F.*

*O.R.T.F.: FRENCH TELEVISION AND RADIO BROADCASTING OFFICE—EQUIVALENT OF THE BBC

WHILE THE FULLY MOBILISED POLICE FORCES ARE BLOCKING TRAIN STATIONS, AIRPORTS AND BORDER CROSSINGS, A DISGUISED OLRİK, HIS PRIZE CAREFULLY HIDDEN, HAS SUCCEEDED THROUGH MANY DETOURS IN AVOIDING ROADBLOCKS AND CHECKPOINTS. HE IS NOW SPEEDING TOWARDS ONE OF HIS TOP-SECRET HIDEOUTS...

We want to remind our listeners that tonight at 9.00 PM you will be able to listen to our special broadcast on the most audacious theft of the century, that of the Queen's necklace!



A FEW HOURS LATER, FAR FROM PARIS...

Phew! I'm finally safe with the loot! Quickly, the TV!



... And this is how, once again, Orlık managed to escape the police at the last minute...



However, that doesn't mean that our action was a complete failure. First, we succeeded in completely destroying the criminal organisation which, through the clever use of the quarry network, was supposed to allow Orlık to carve up Paris and its surroundings at will... But there's even better!



Indeed, our friend Pradier was kind enough to leave to me the enjoyable privilege of telling you that the necklace Orlık took with him is only the copy, which we placed into the merry-go-round hiding place moments before he arrived!!!



I must confess to a certain amount of jubilation as I picture his expression right this minute!!!



LIKE A MADMAN, OLRİK HAS RUSHED TO THE NECKLACE, STILL WRAPPED IN DURANTON'S SCARF...



AND WHILE THE COLONEL, BOILING WITH IMPOTENT RAGE, TAKES IT OUT ON THE FAKE NECKLACE...

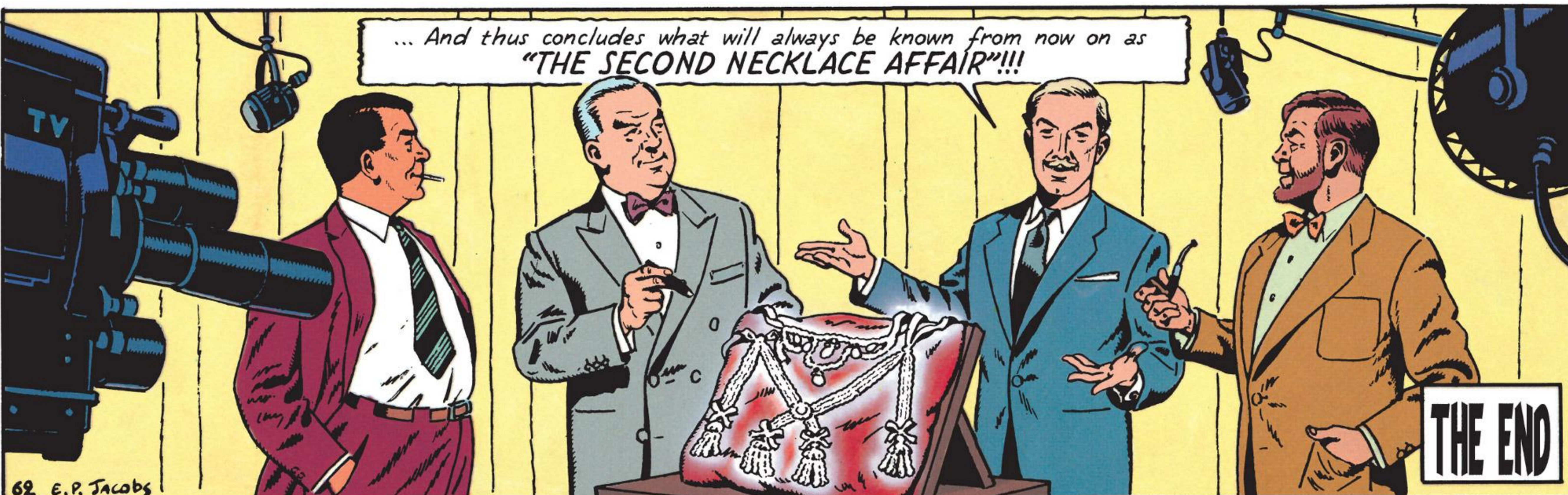


... IT'S SIR HENRY WILLIAMSON'S TURN TO SPEAK...

As for the real necklace, I will offer it to France, as was always my intention anyway, so that it will replace the replica currently displayed within the historical site of Versailles Palace...

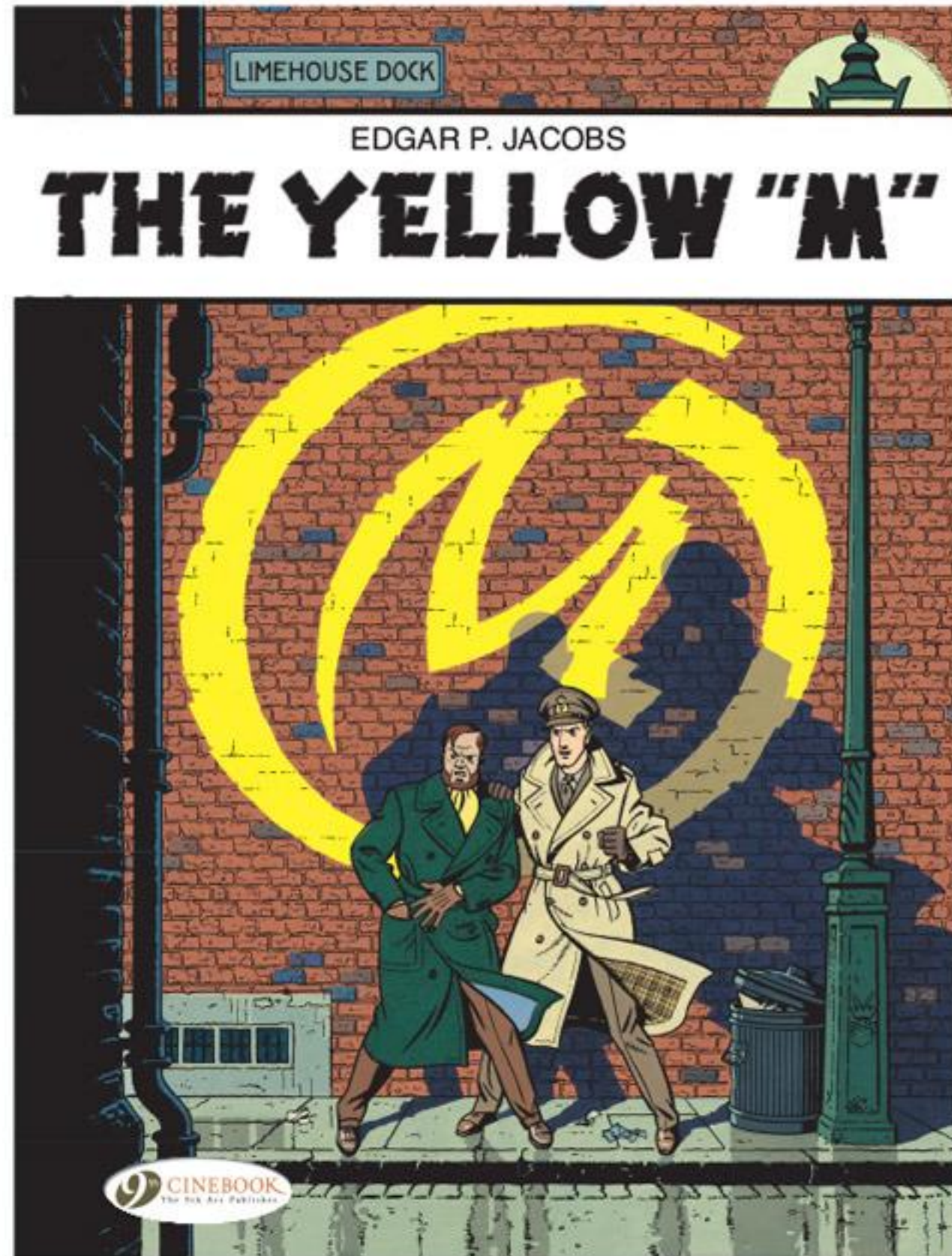


... And thus concludes what will always be known from now on as "THE SECOND NECKLACE AFFAIR"!!!

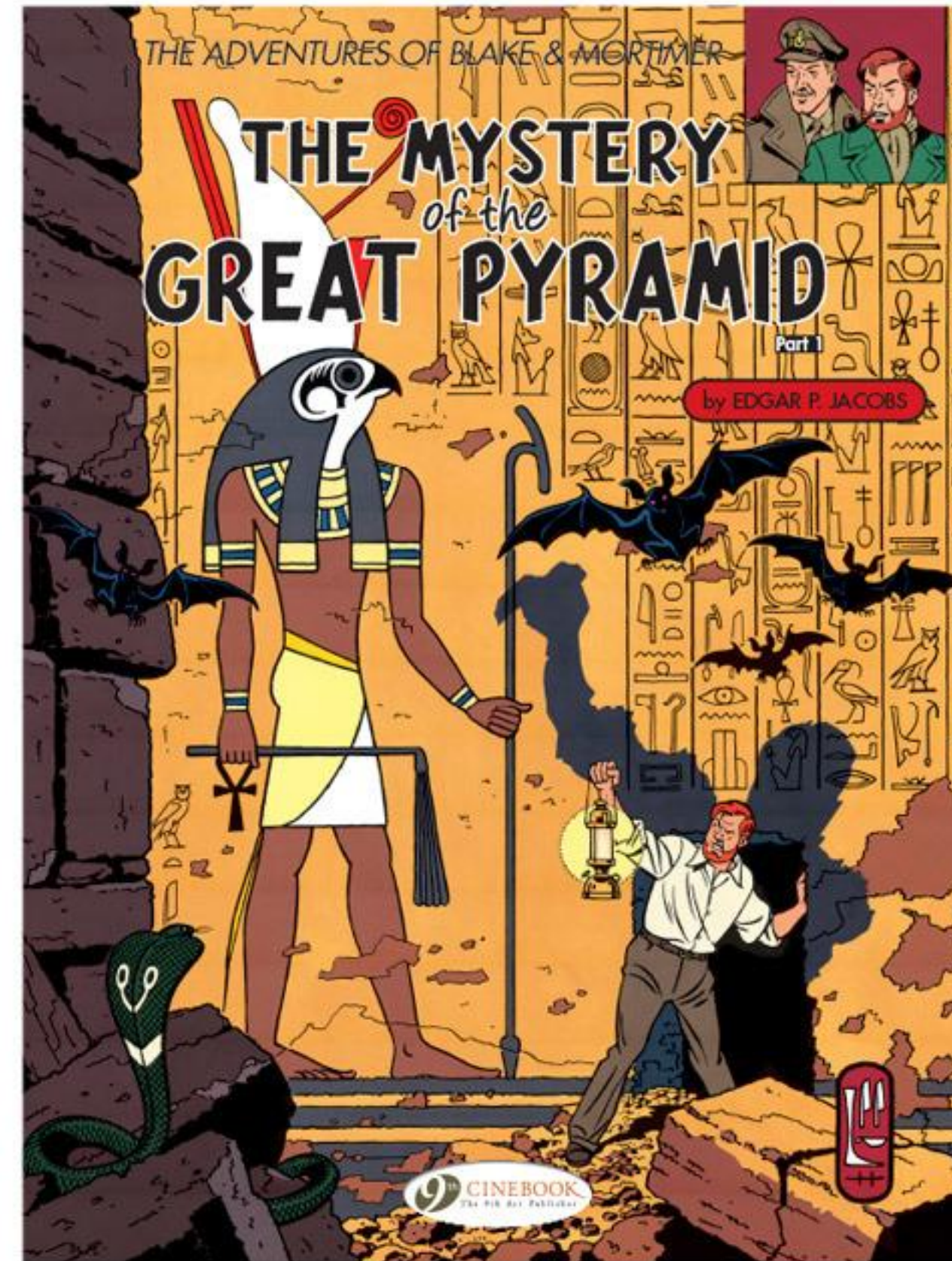




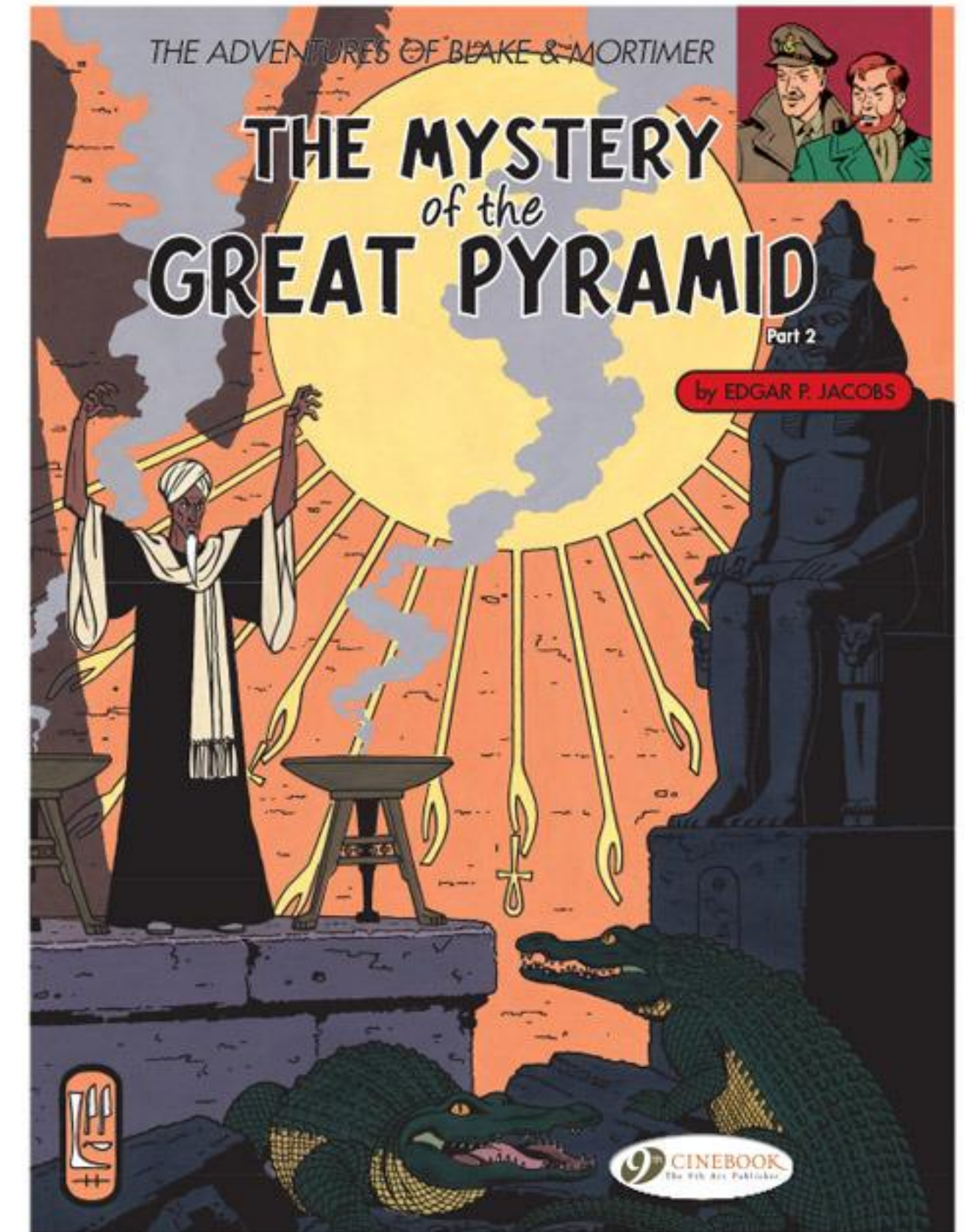
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



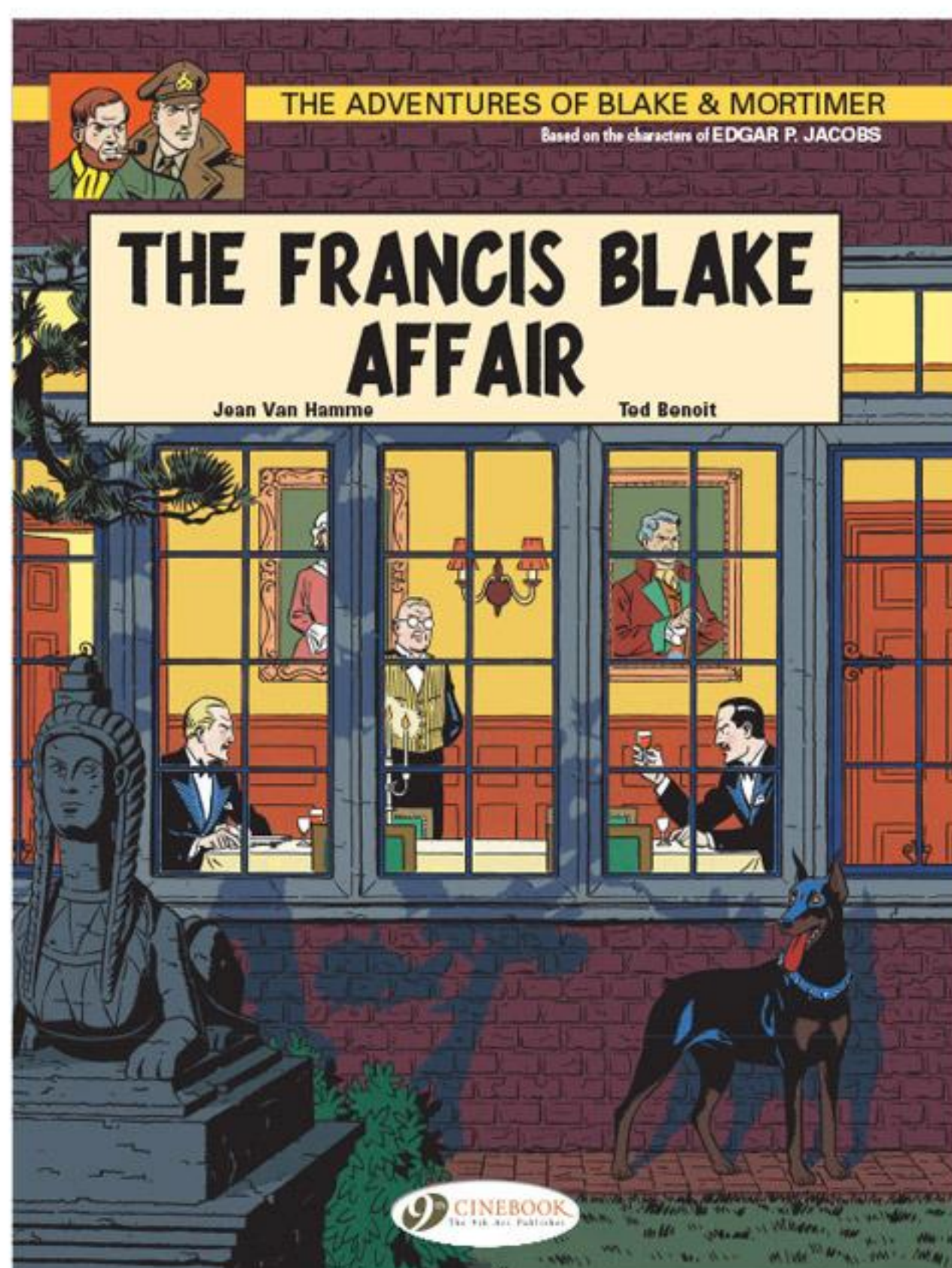
① The Yellow "M"
EDGAR P. JACOBS



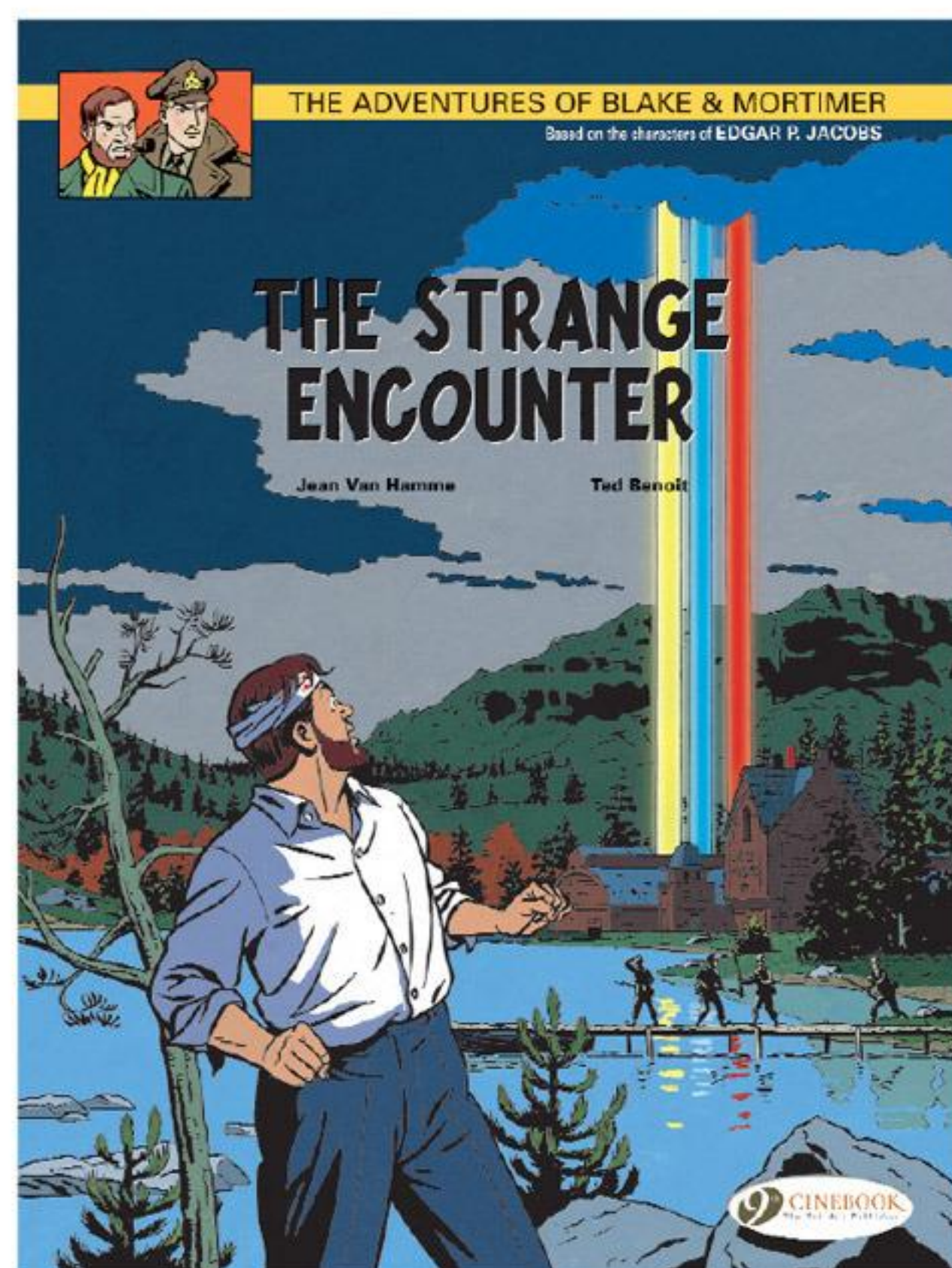
② The Mystery of the
Great Pyramid Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



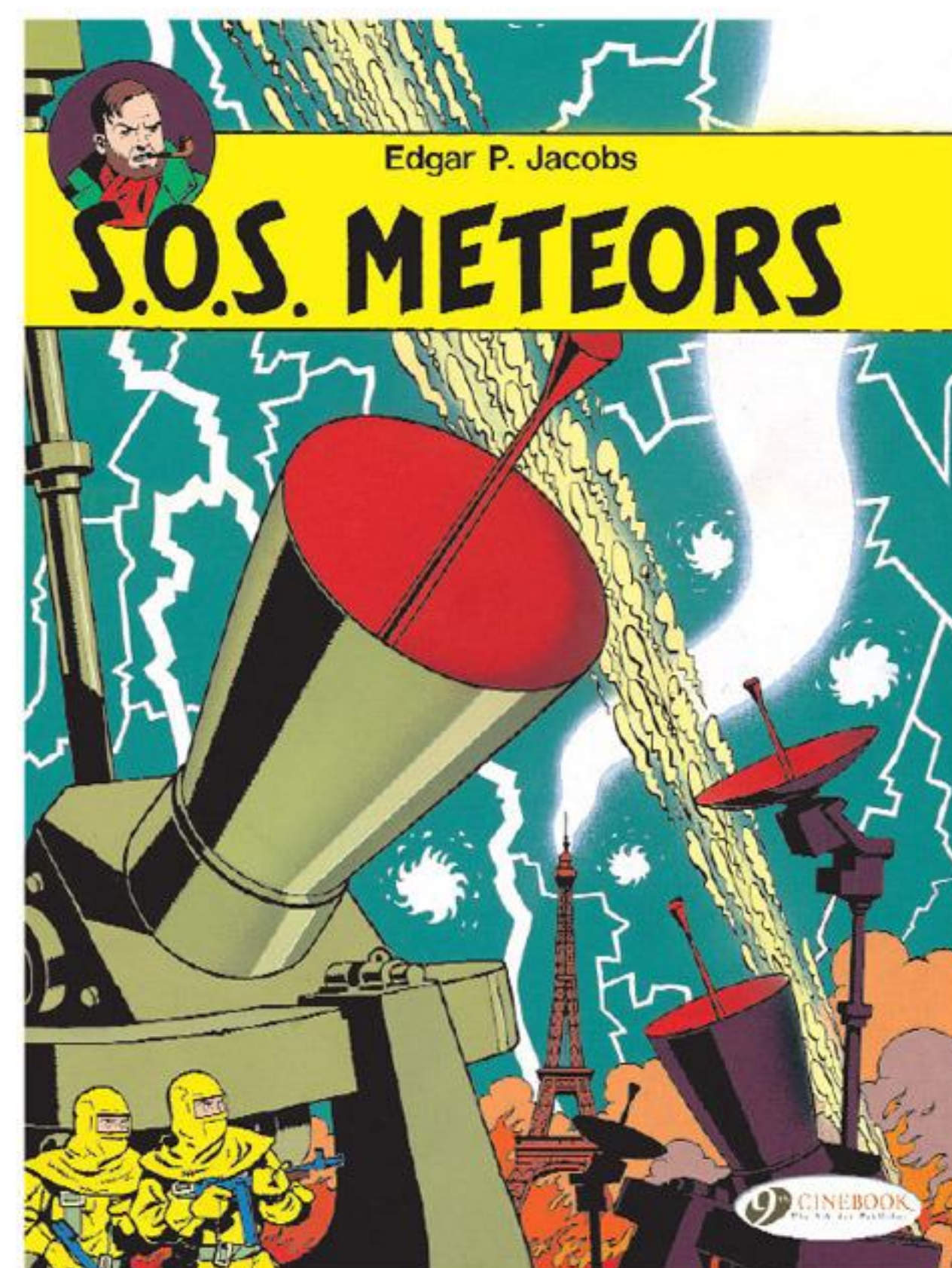
③ The Mystery of the
Great Pyramid Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



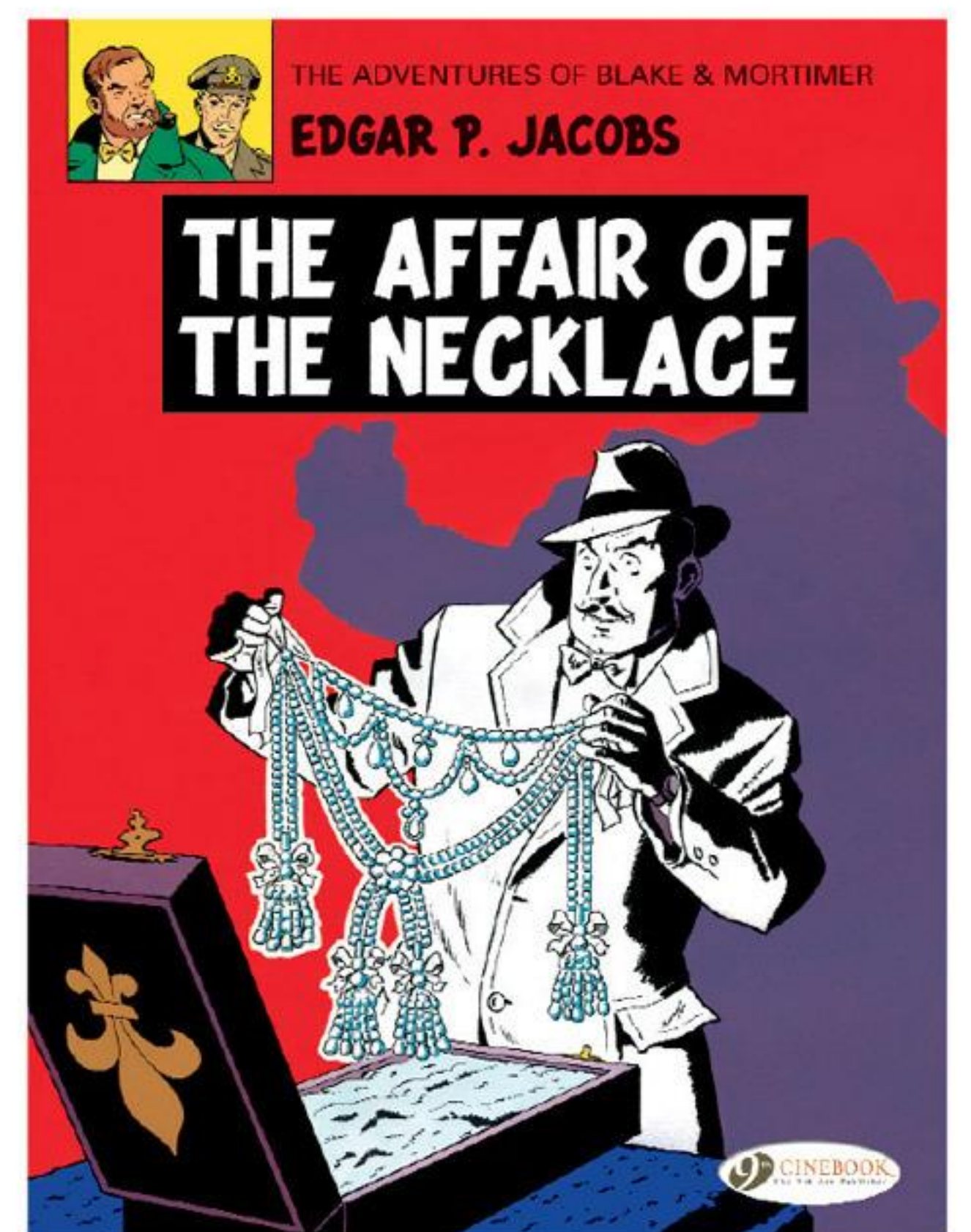
④ The Francis Blake Affair
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



⑤ The Strange Encounter
VAN HAMME - BENOIT

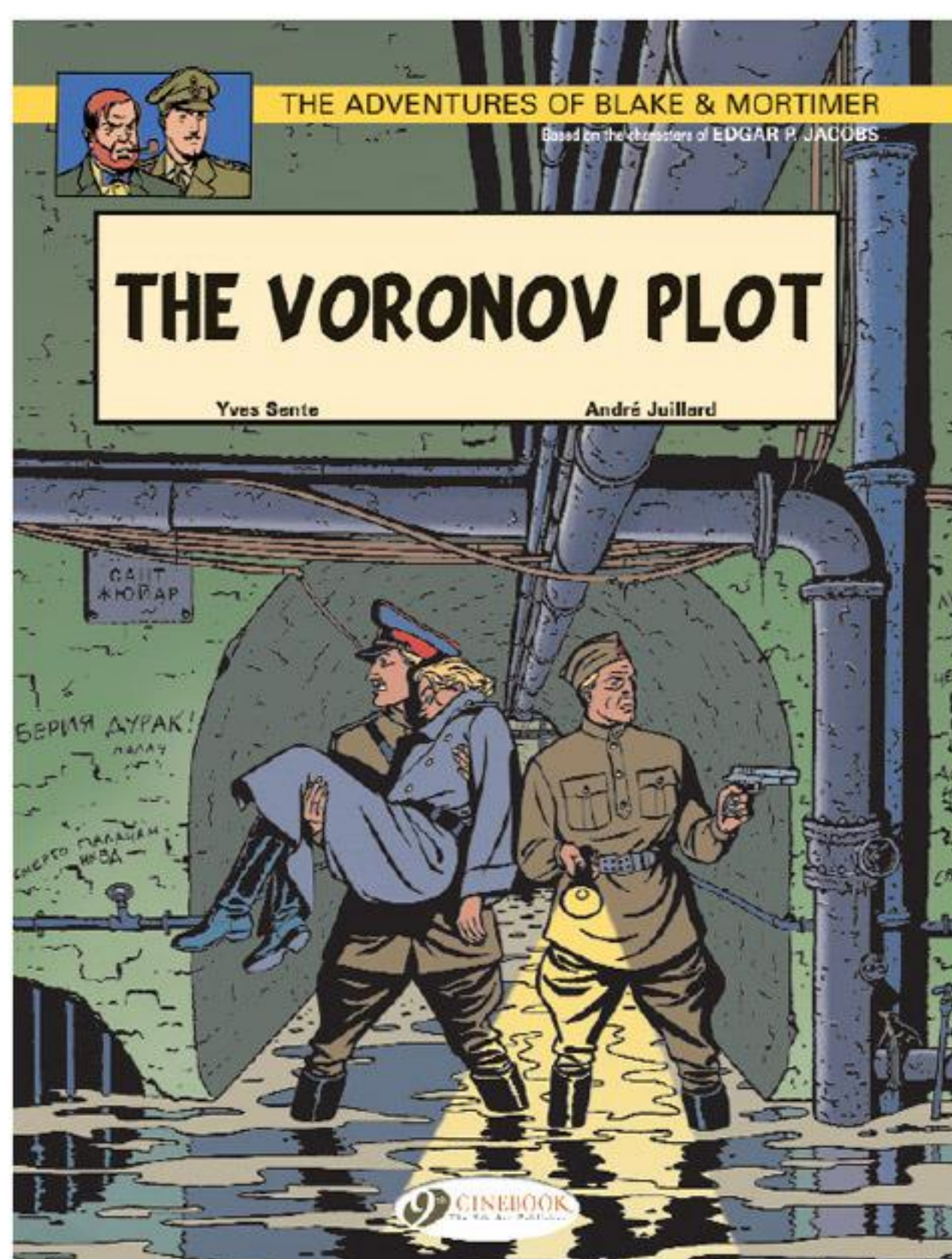


⑥ S.O.S. Meteors
EDGAR P. JACOBS

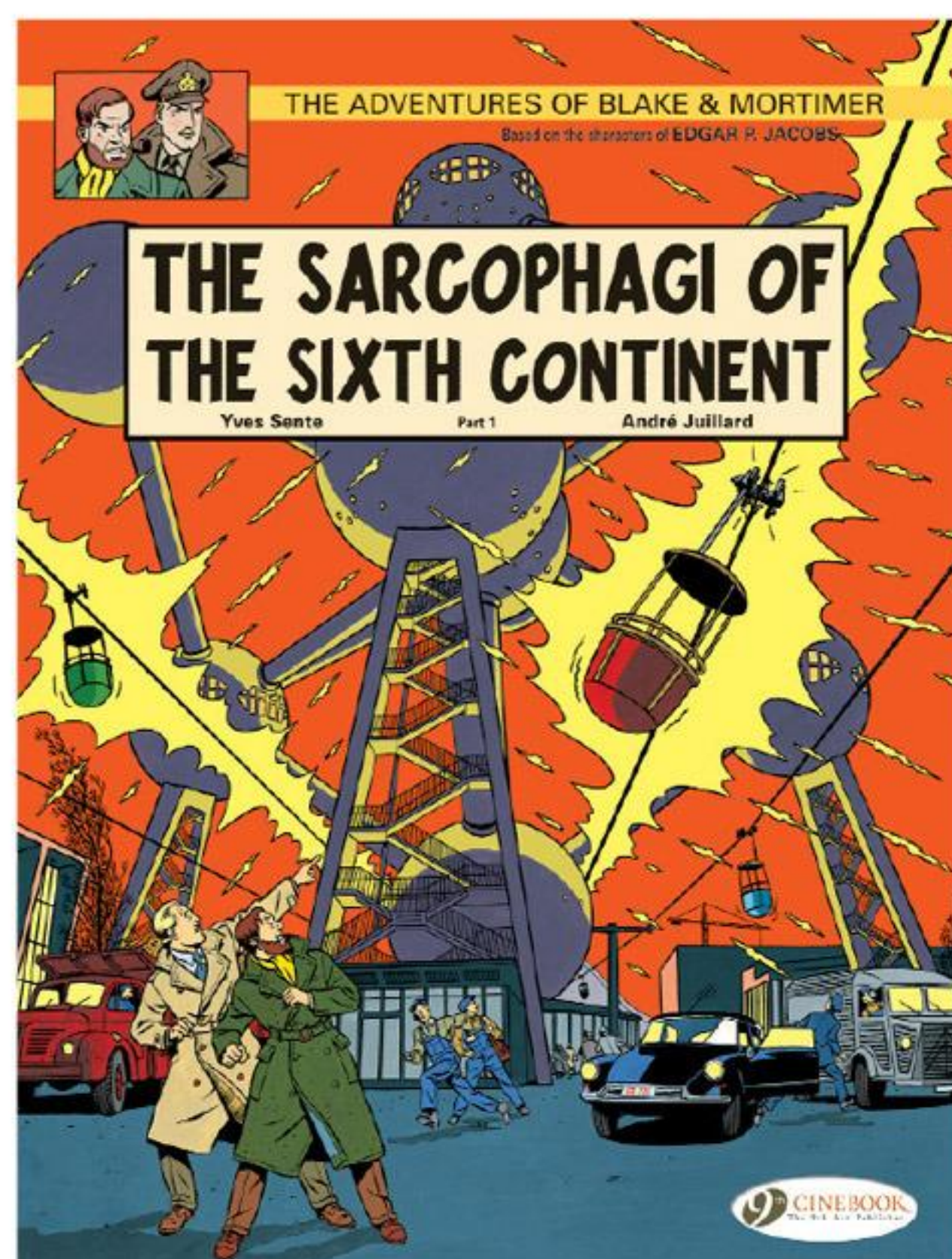


⑦ The Affair of the Necklace
EDGAR P. JACOBS

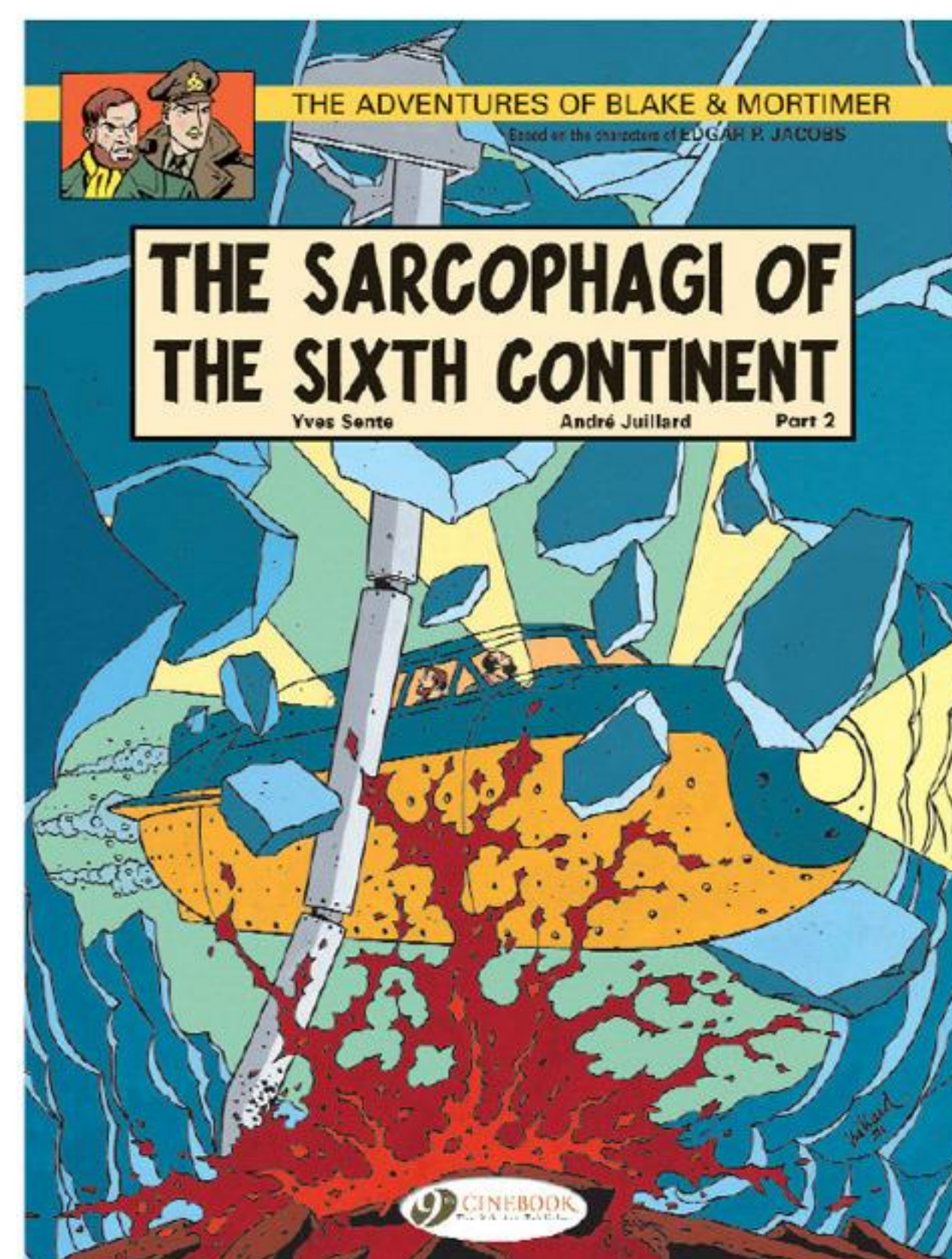
COMING SOON



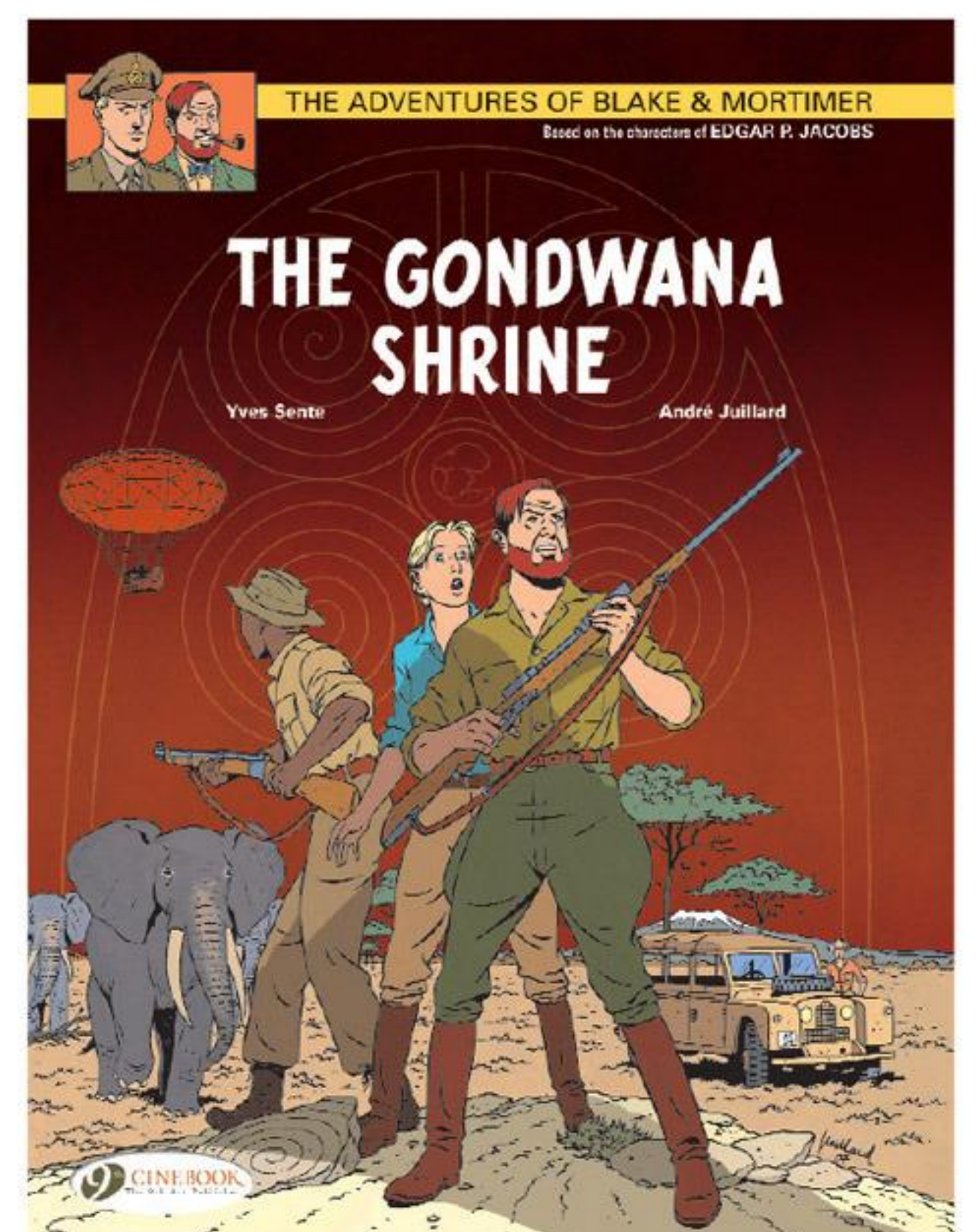
⑧ The Voronov Plot
SENTE - JUILLARD



⑨ The Sarcophagi of
the Sixth Continent Part 1
SENTE - JUILLARD



⑩ The Sarcophagi of
the Sixth Continent Part 2
SENTE - JUILLARD

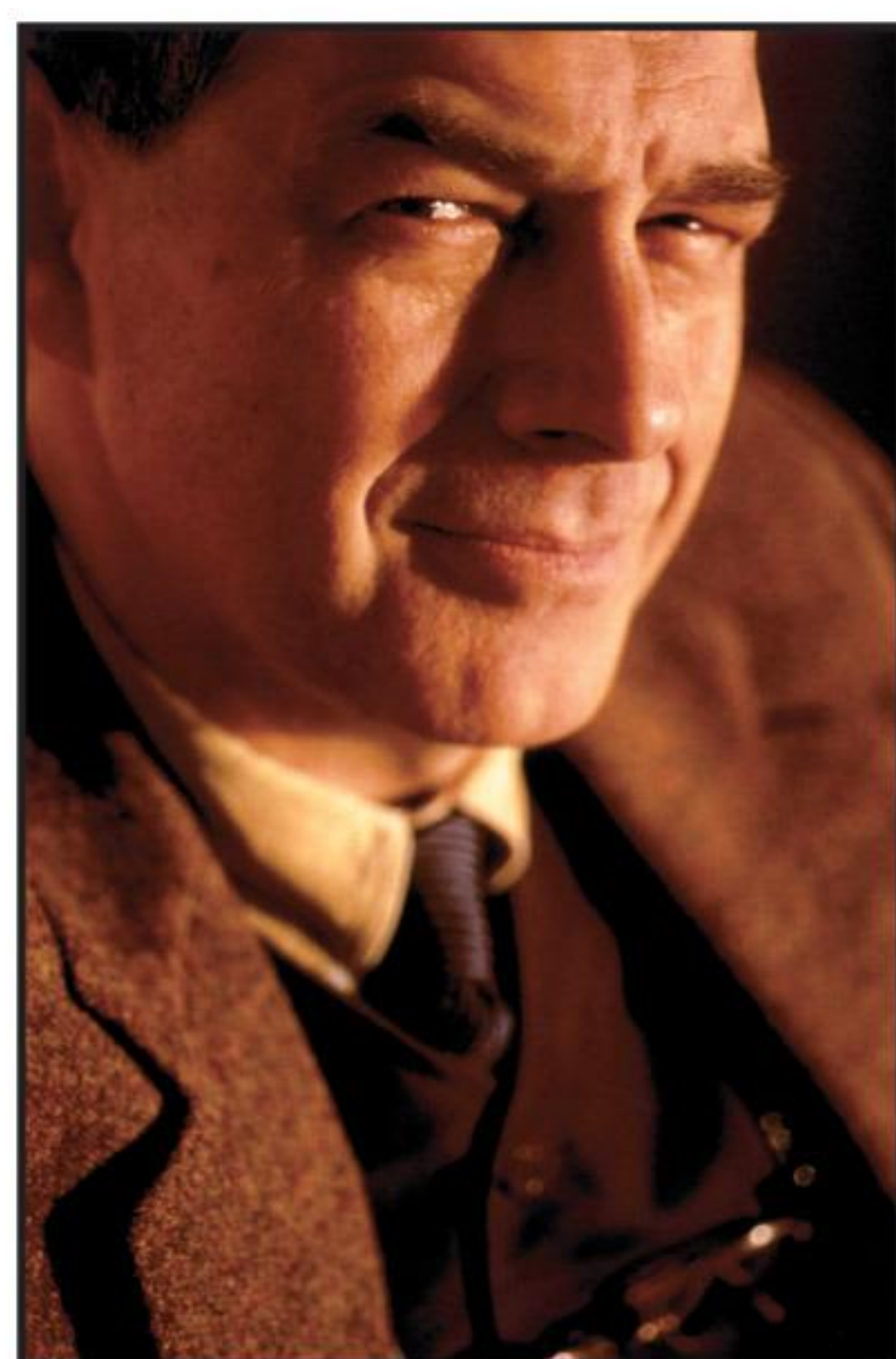


⑪ The Gondwana Shrine
SENTE - JUILLARD

A MYSTERIOUS VIRUS IS DECIMATING THE MASTERS OF THE KREMLIN AND THREATENING THE WESTERN WORLD



© Editions Blake & Mortimer / Studio Jacobs (Dargaud-Lombard s.a.) - E.P. Jacobs



ANDRÉ JUILLARD

THE VORONOV PLOT

SEPTEMBER 2010

TRANSLATED
FOR THE FIRST TIME INTO ENGLISH

PUBLISHED BY



YVES SENTÉ



THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

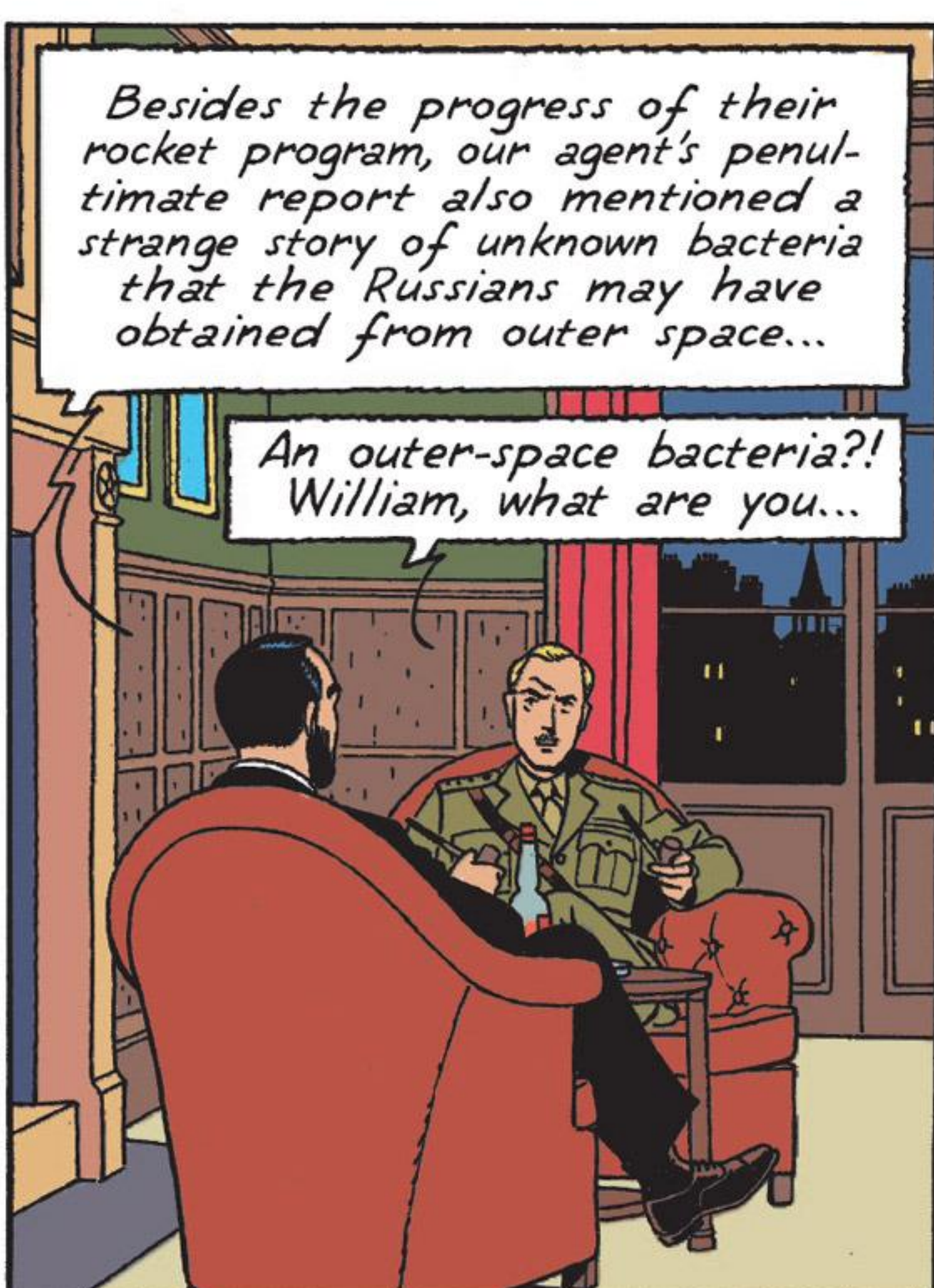
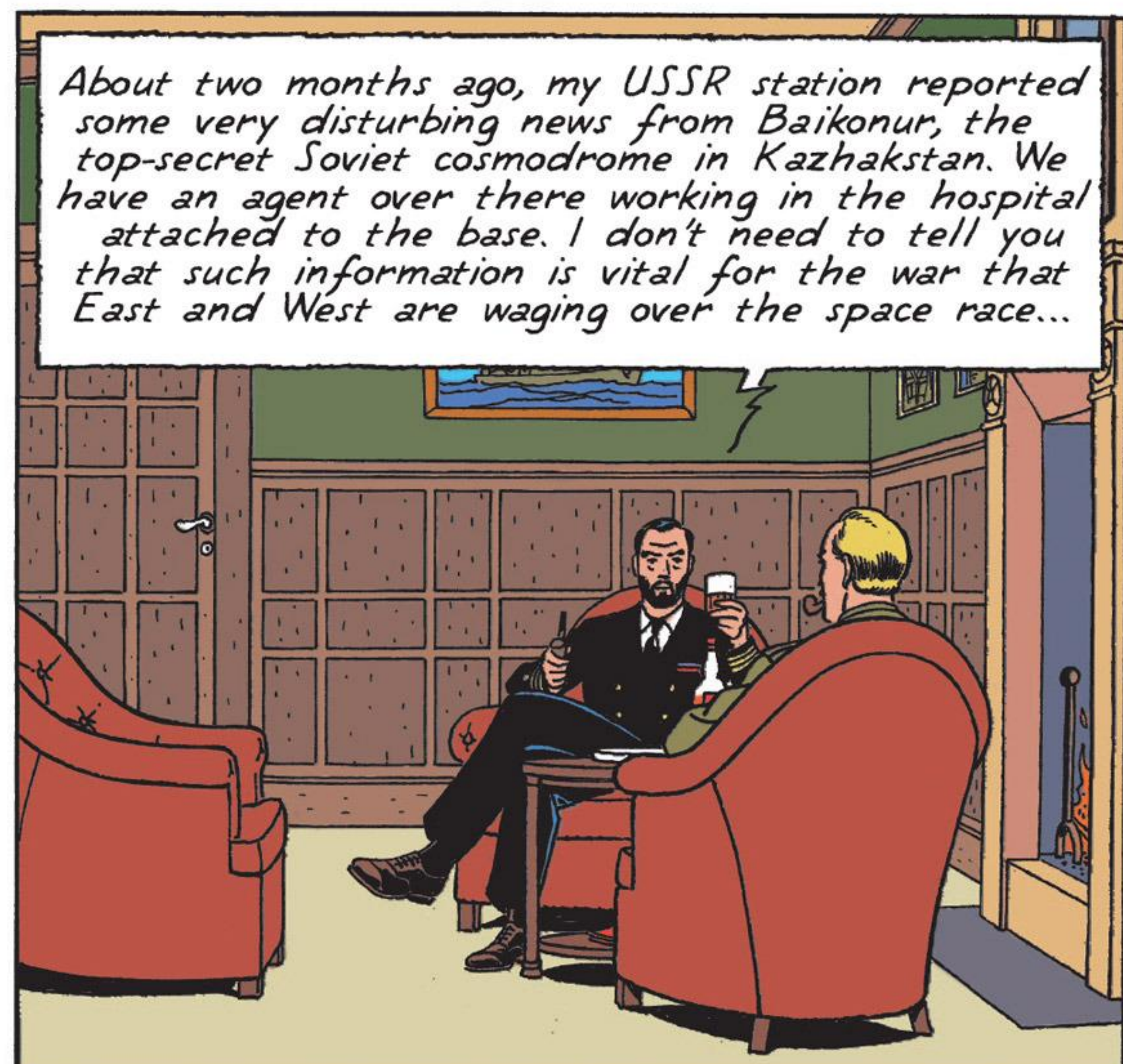
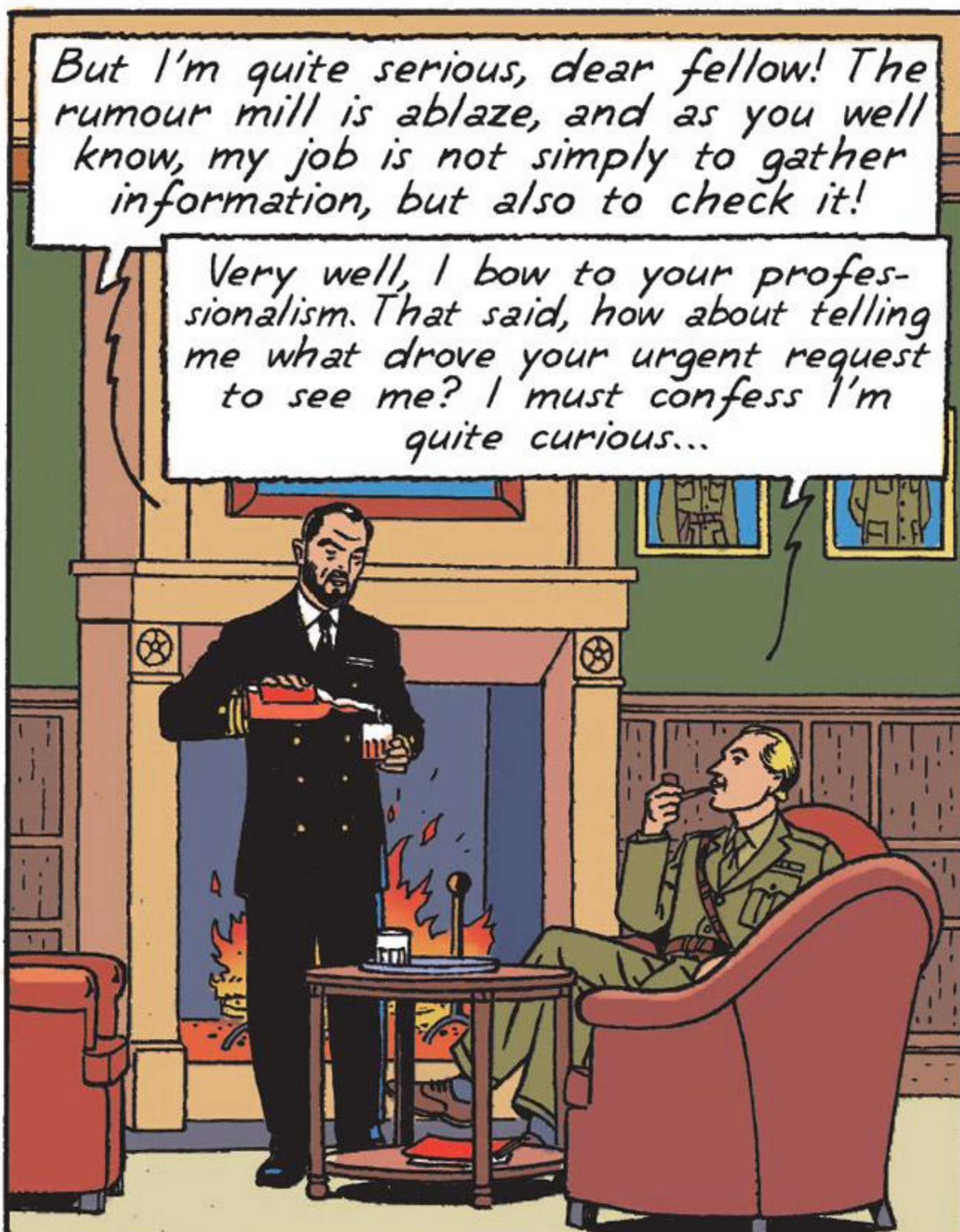
Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

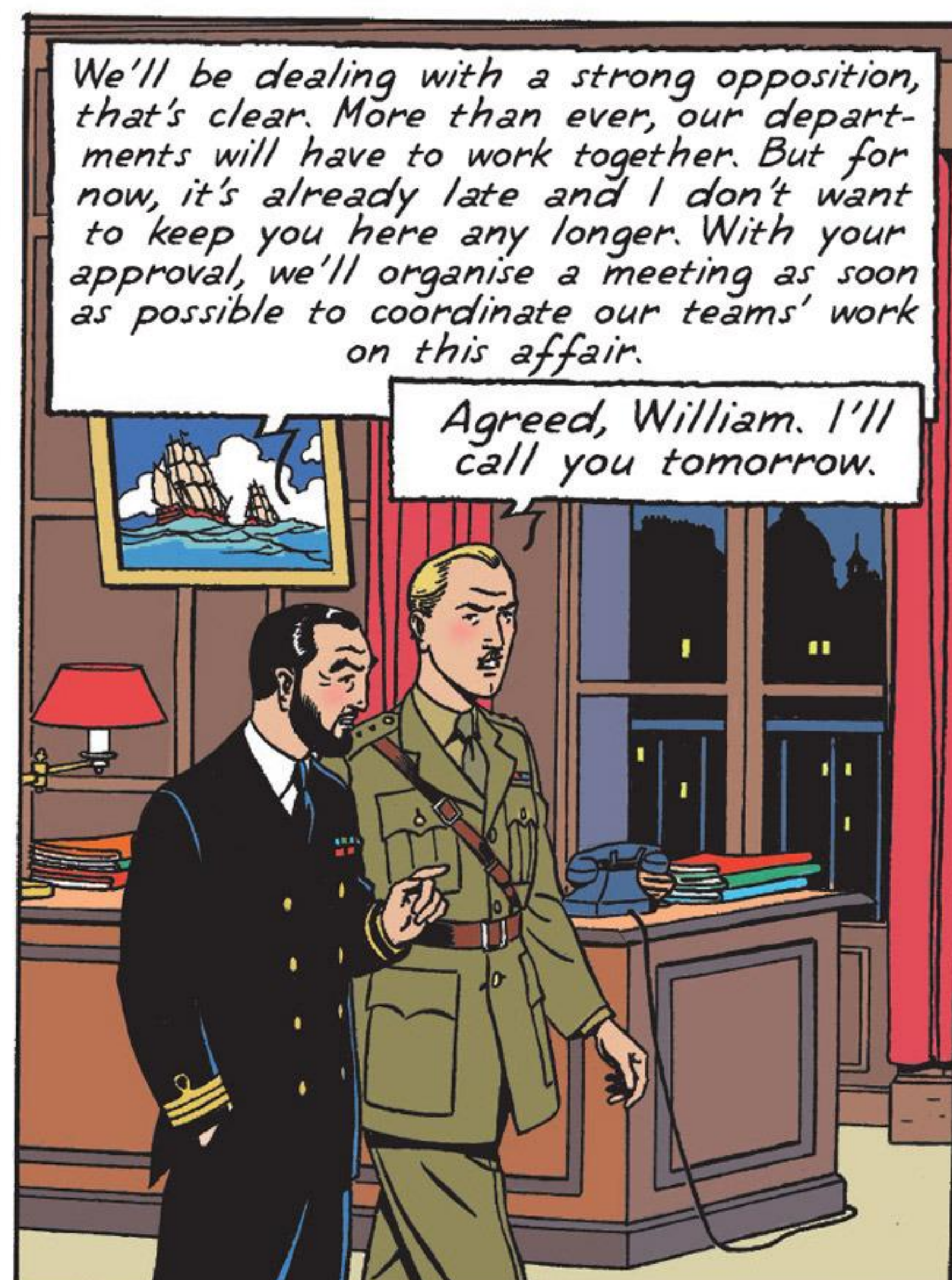
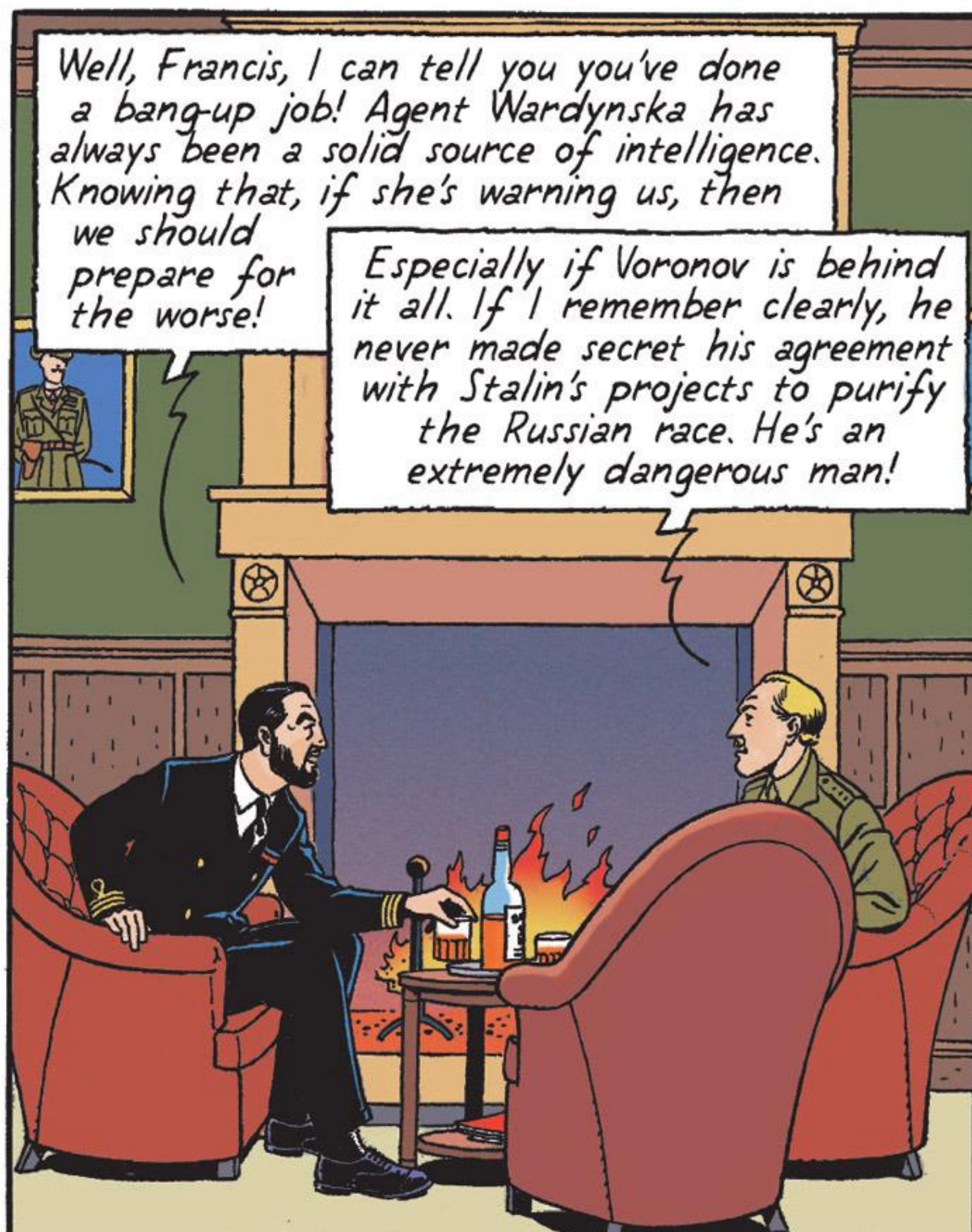
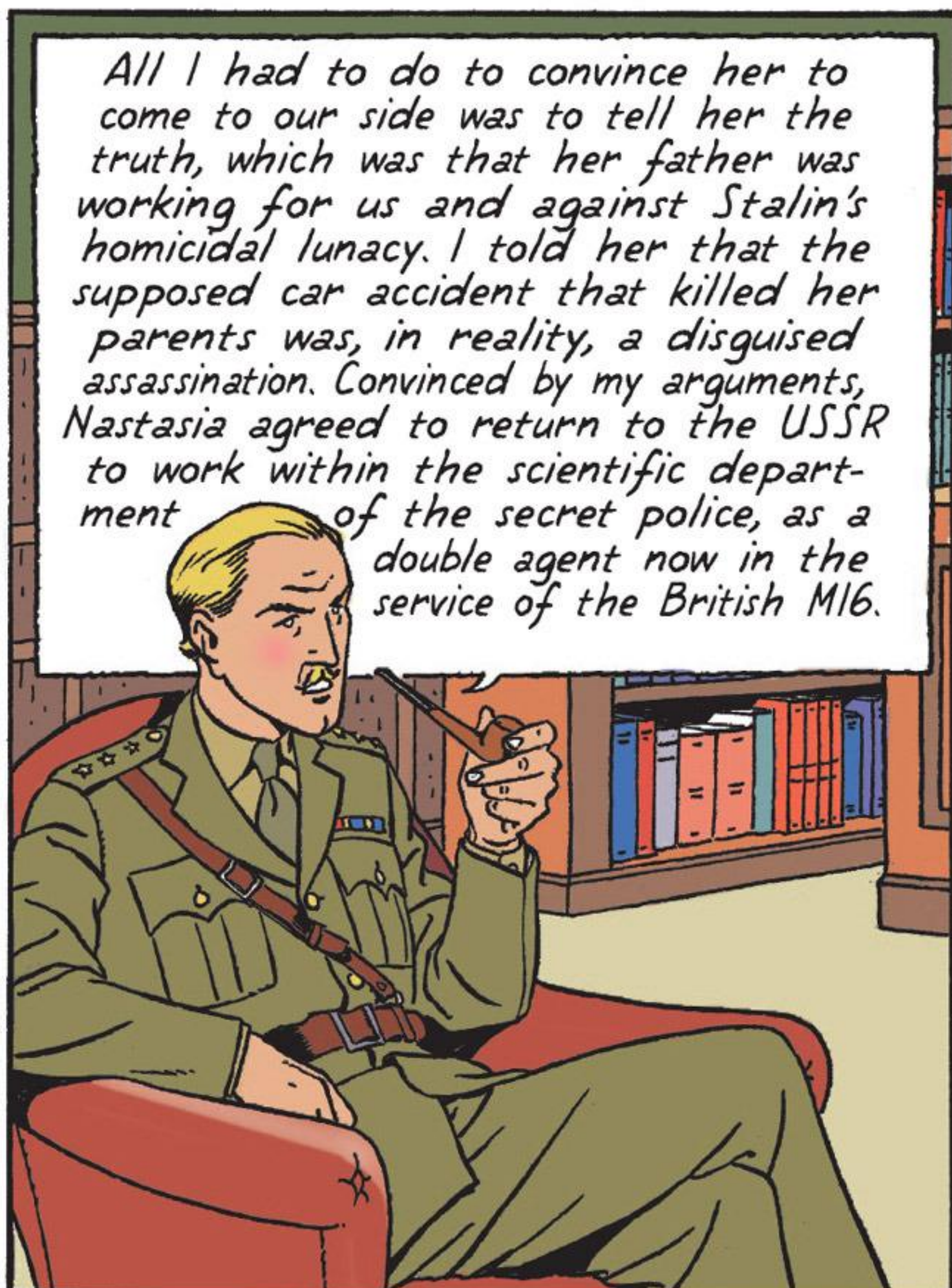
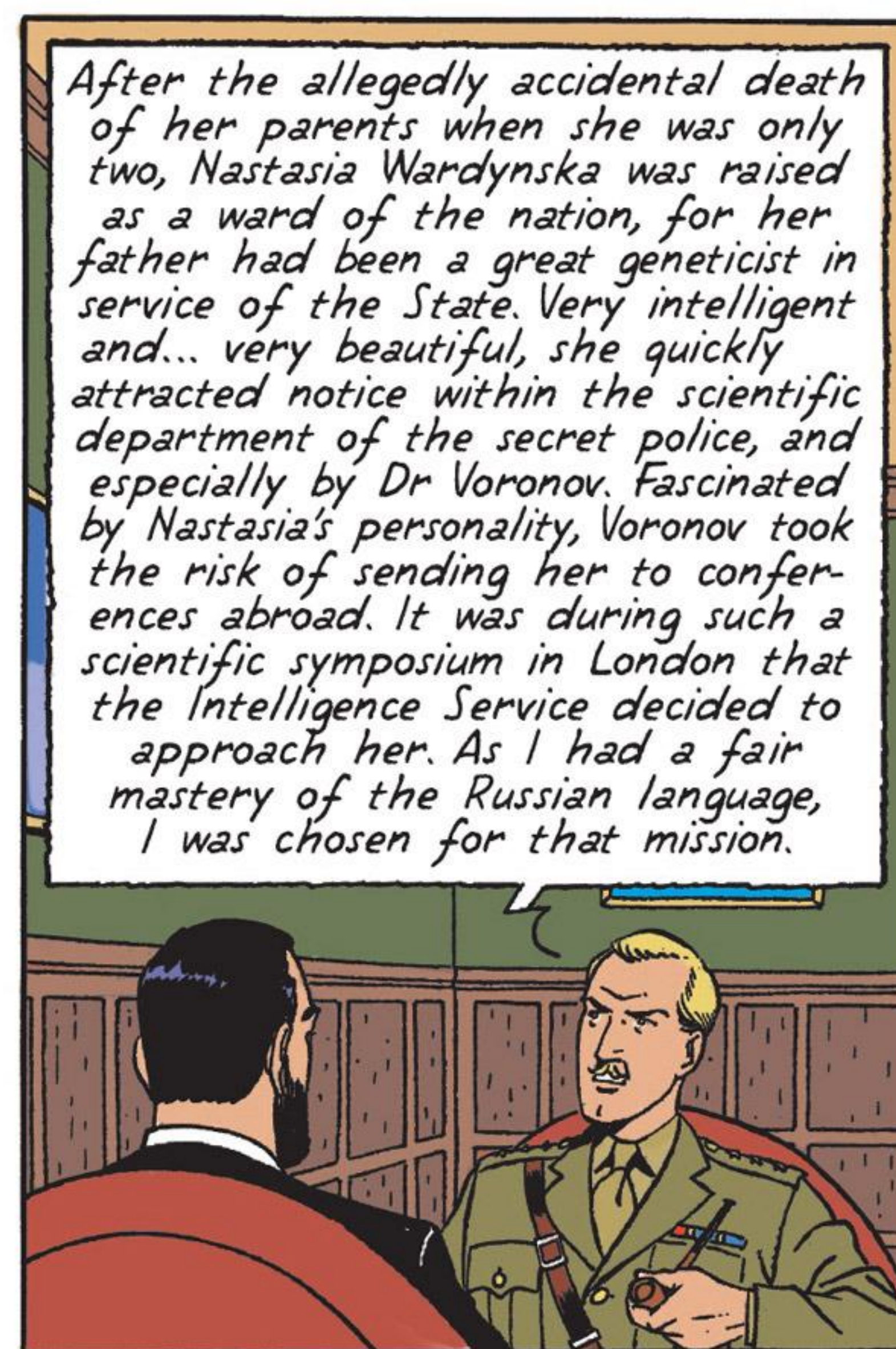
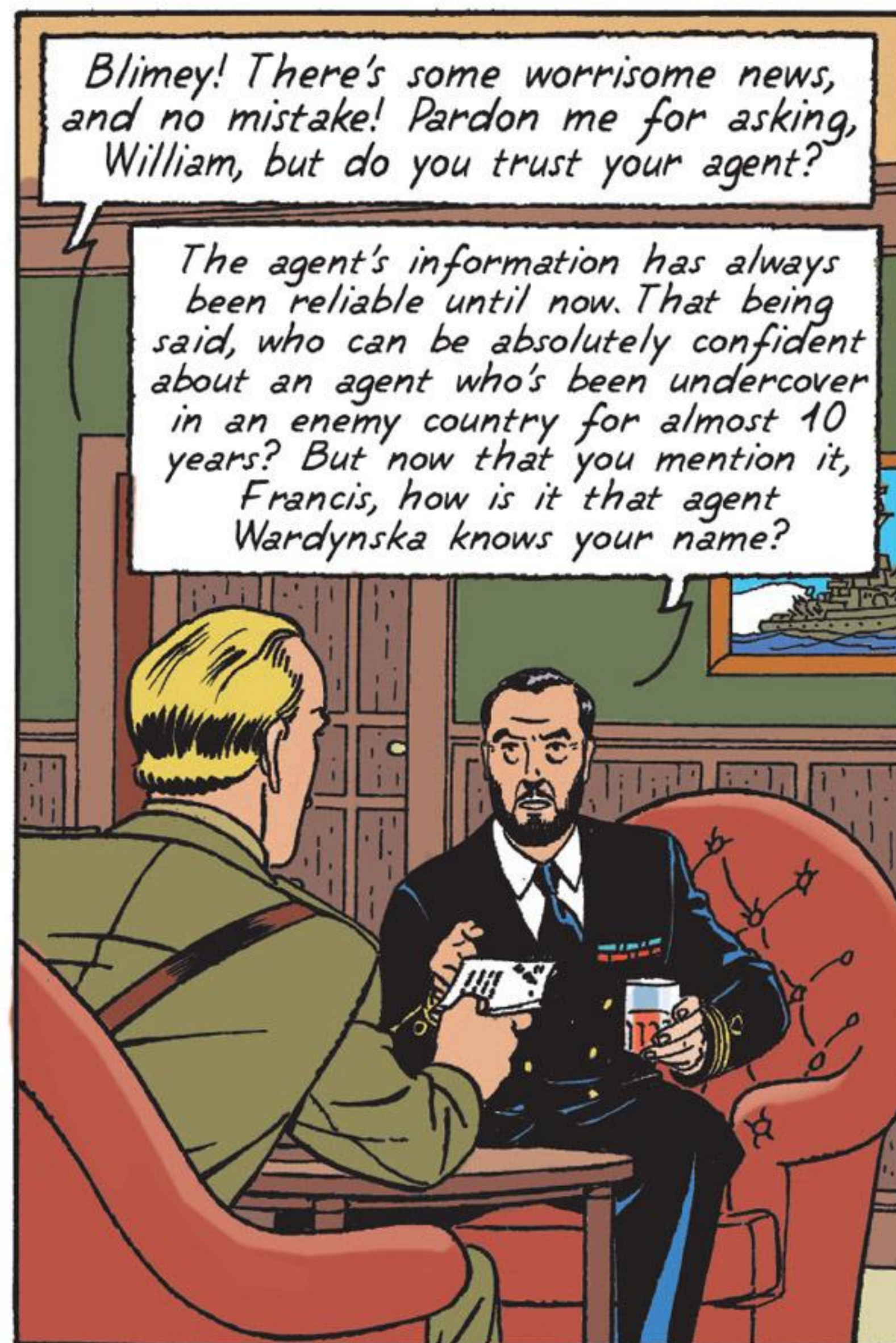
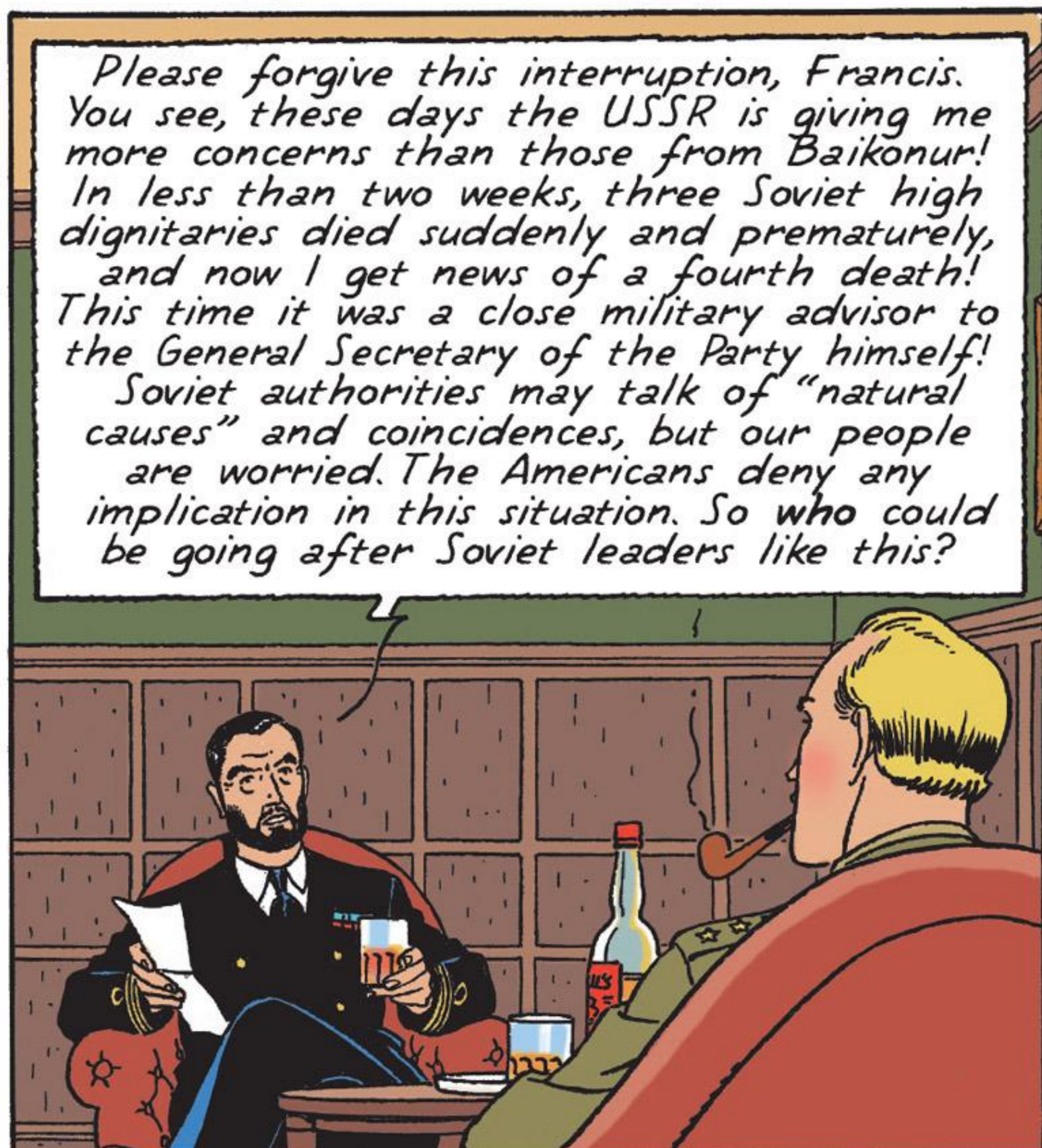
THE VORONOV PLOT

Yves Sente

André Juillard





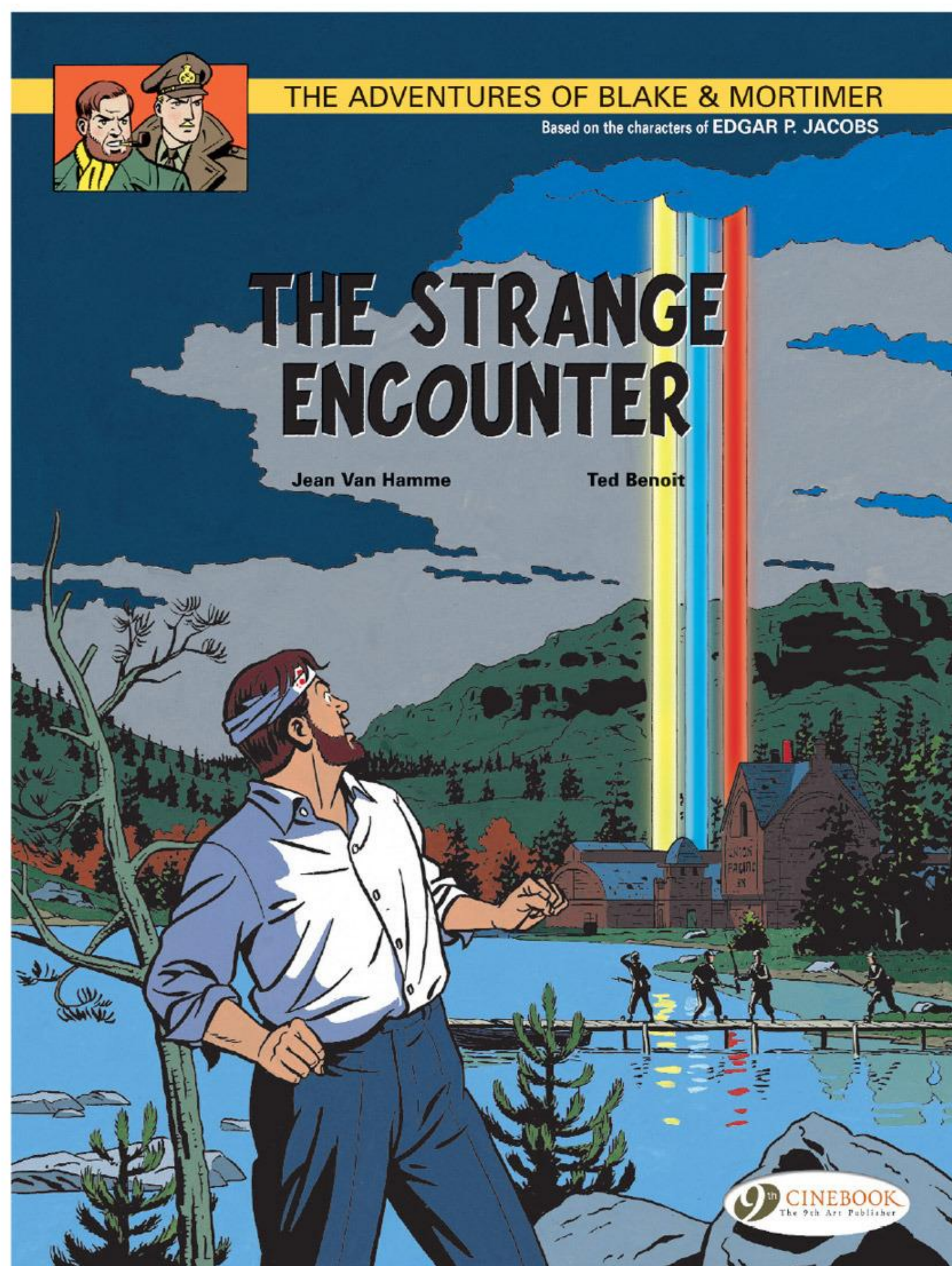


THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER

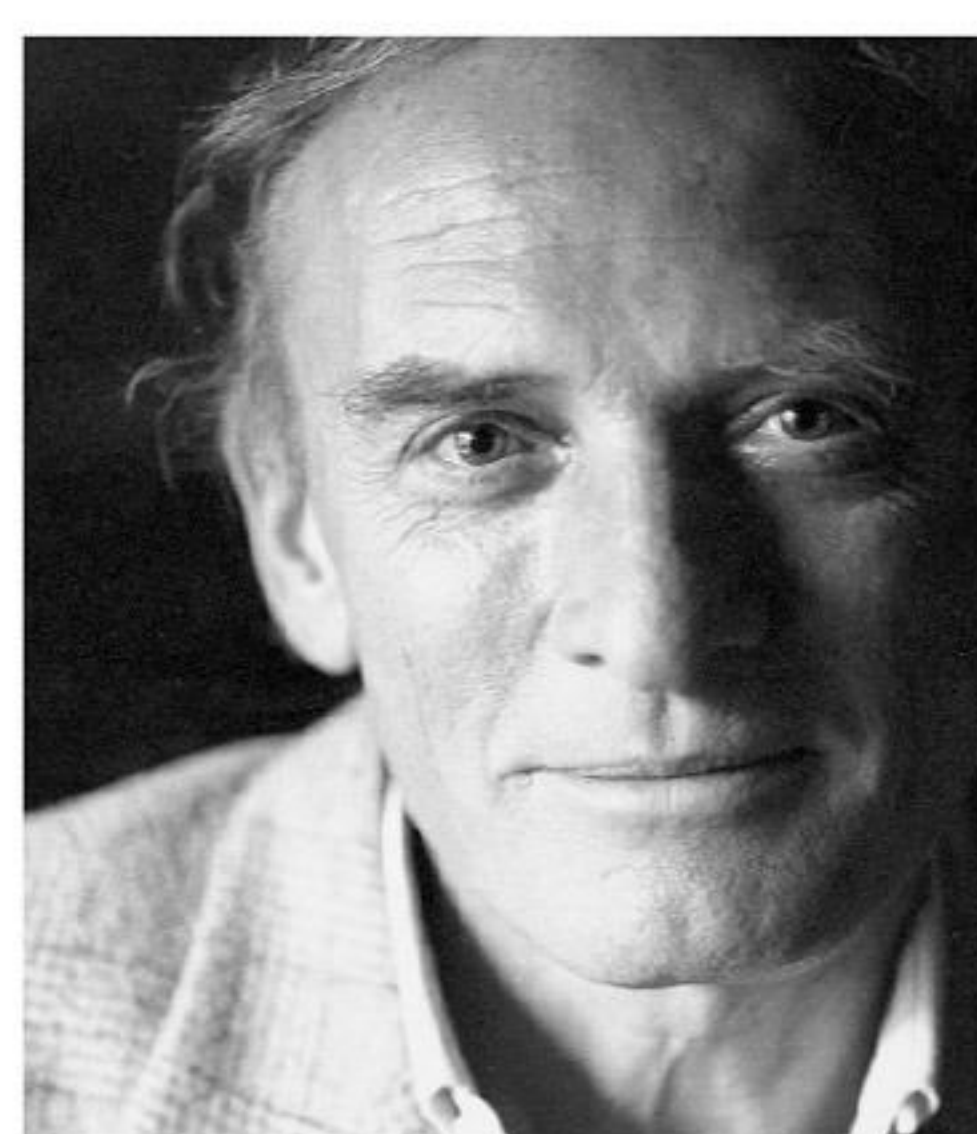
Jean Van Hamme

Ted Benoit

Based on the characters of **EDGAR P. JACOBS**

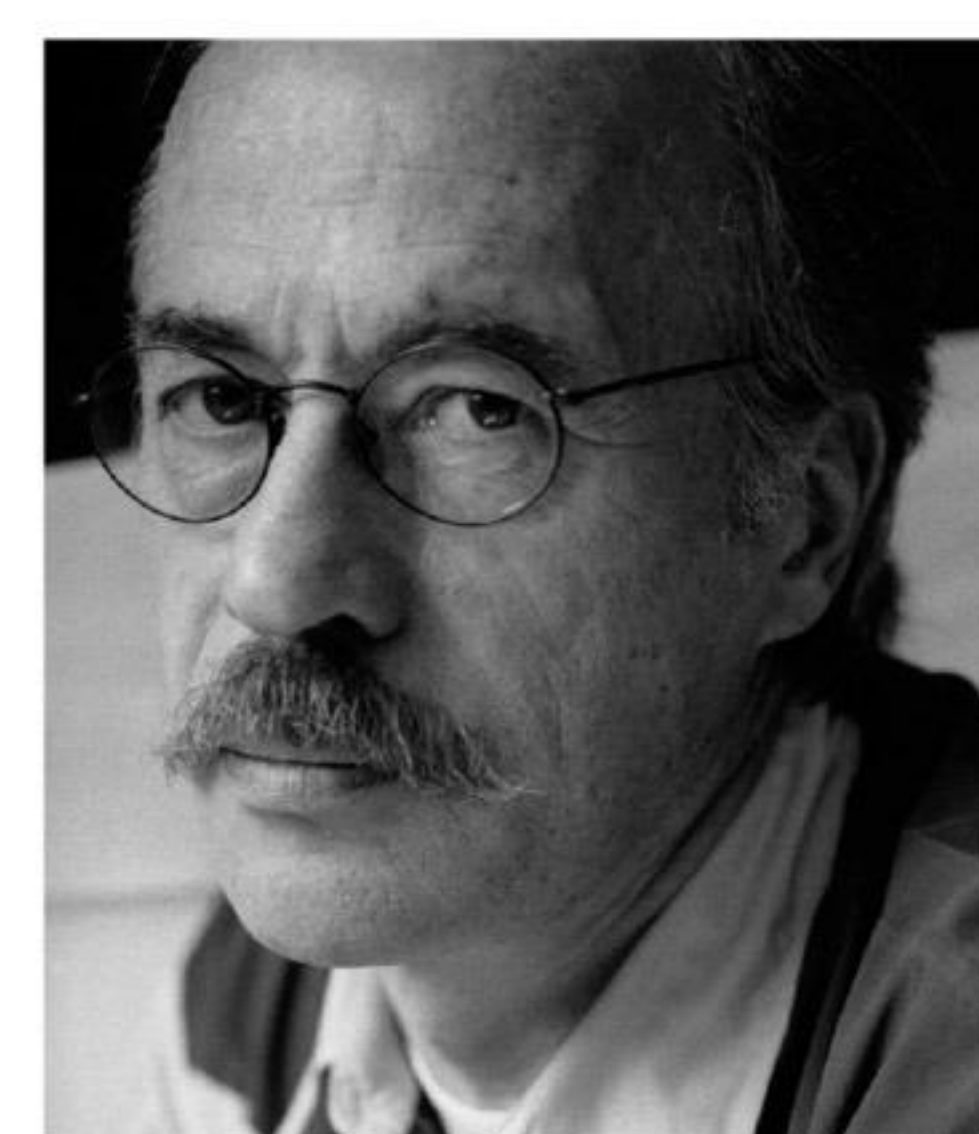


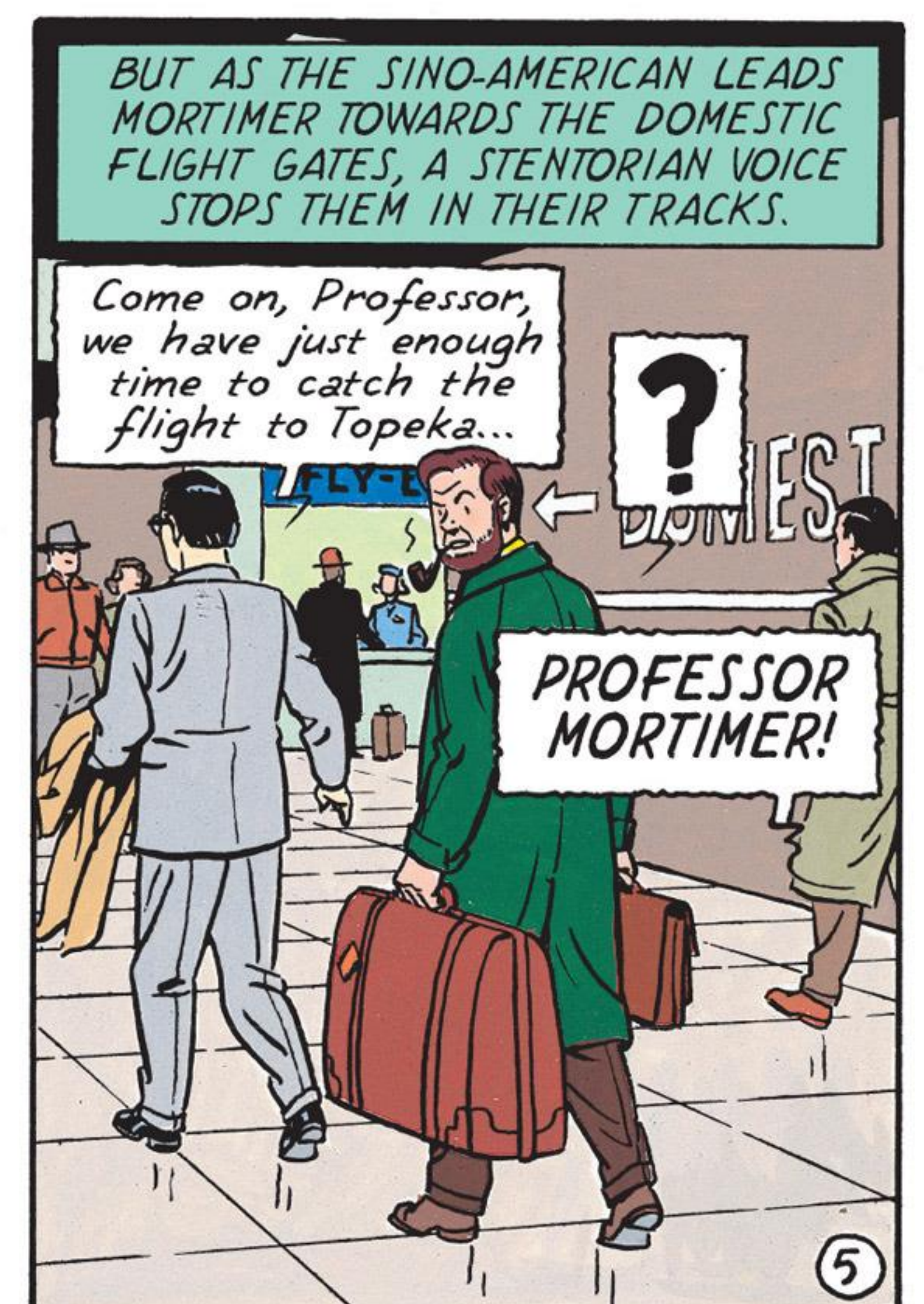
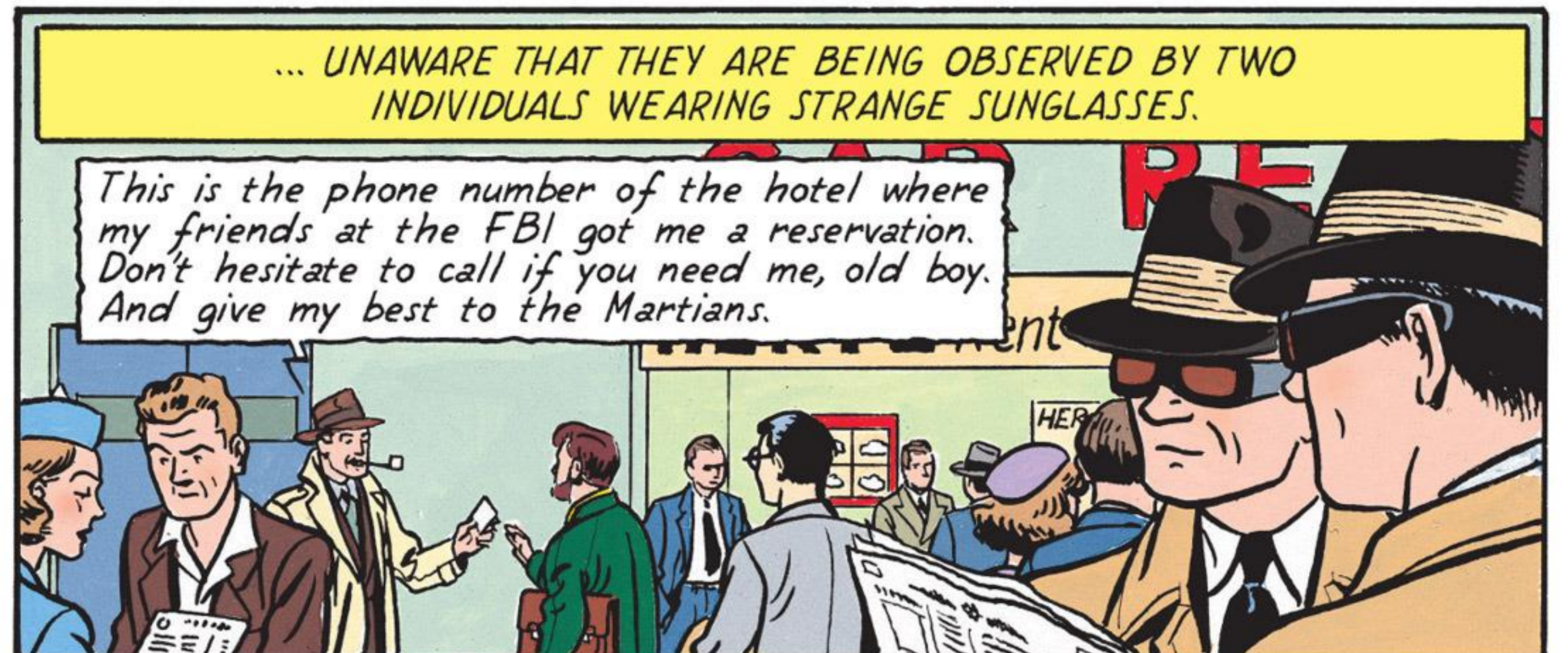
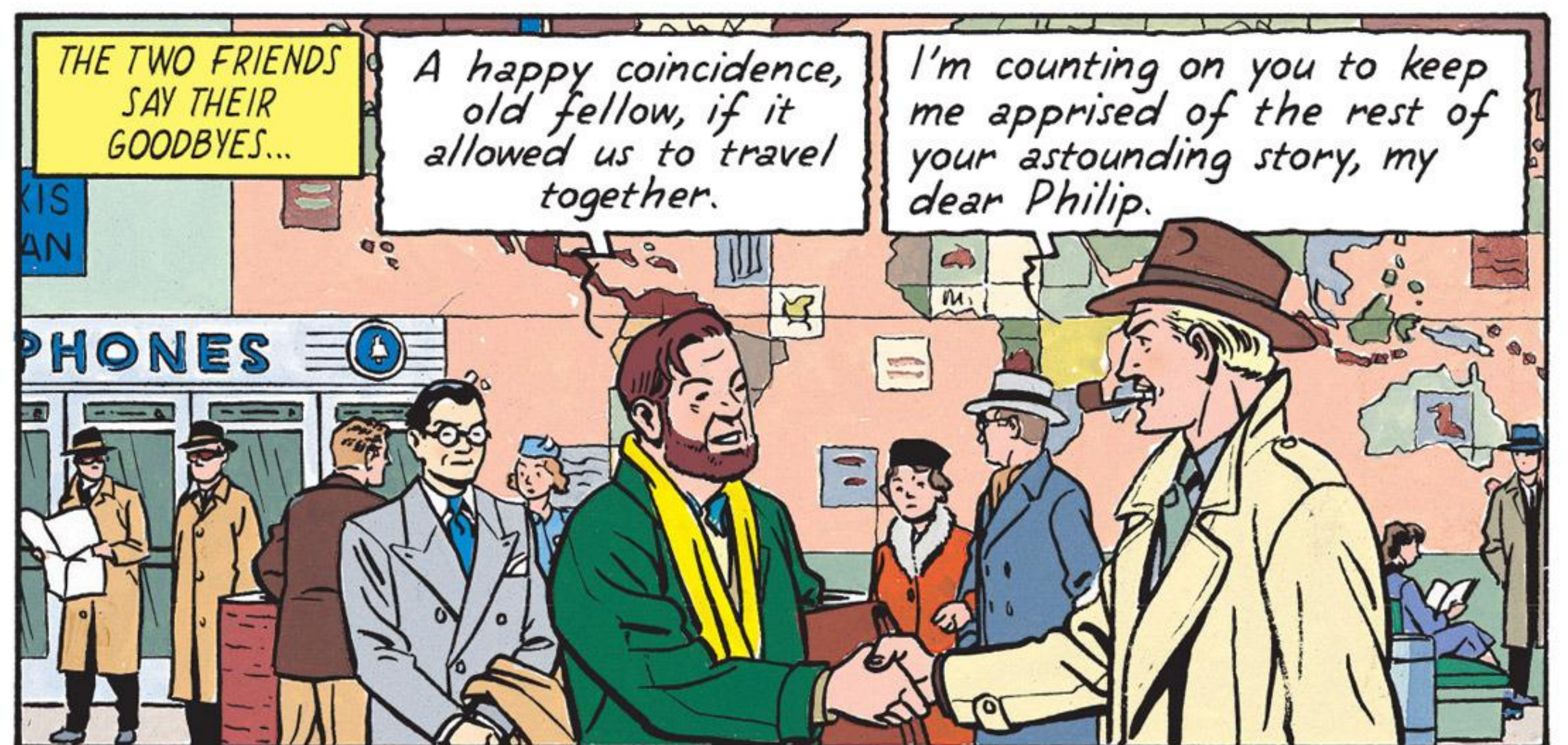
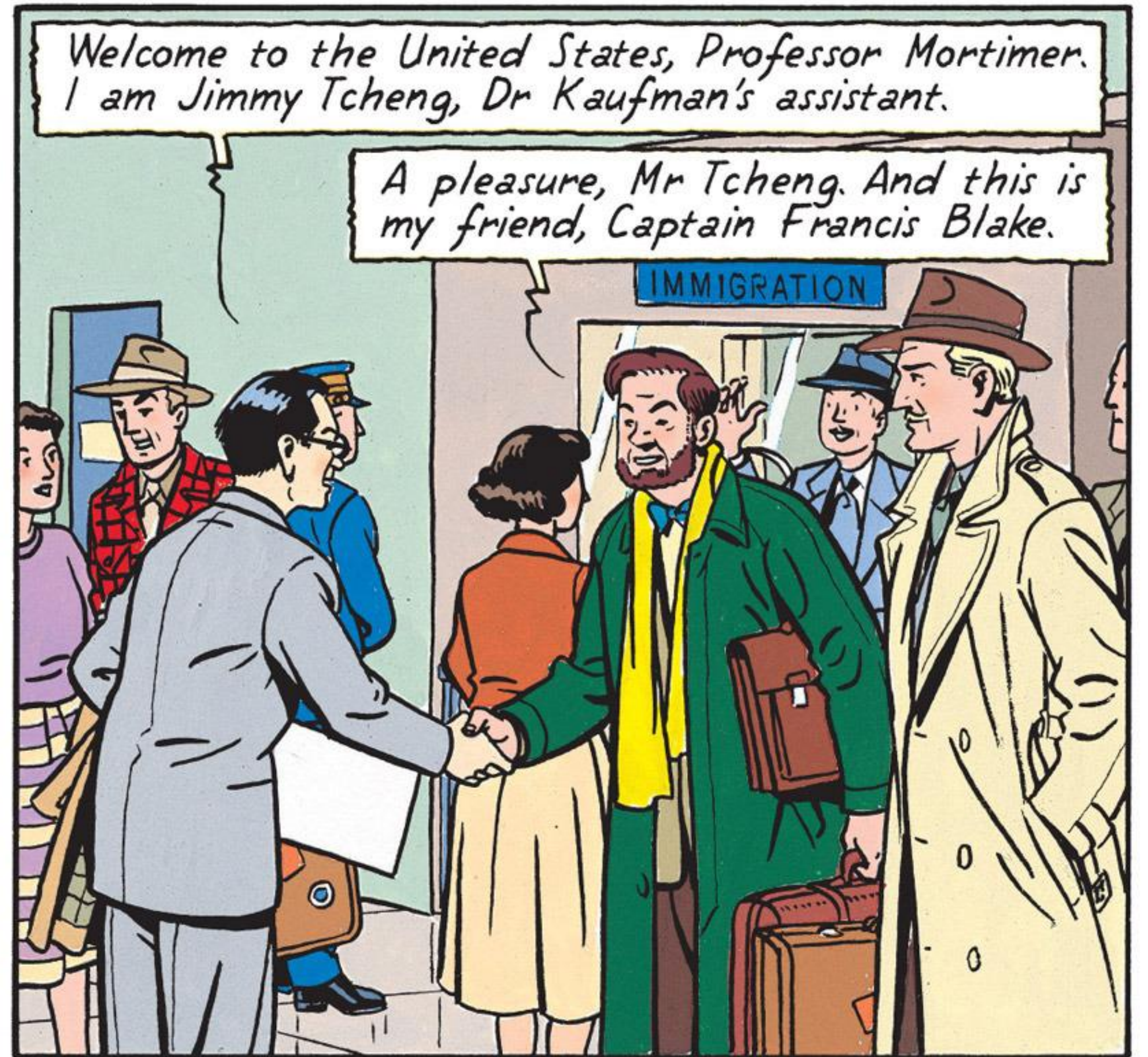
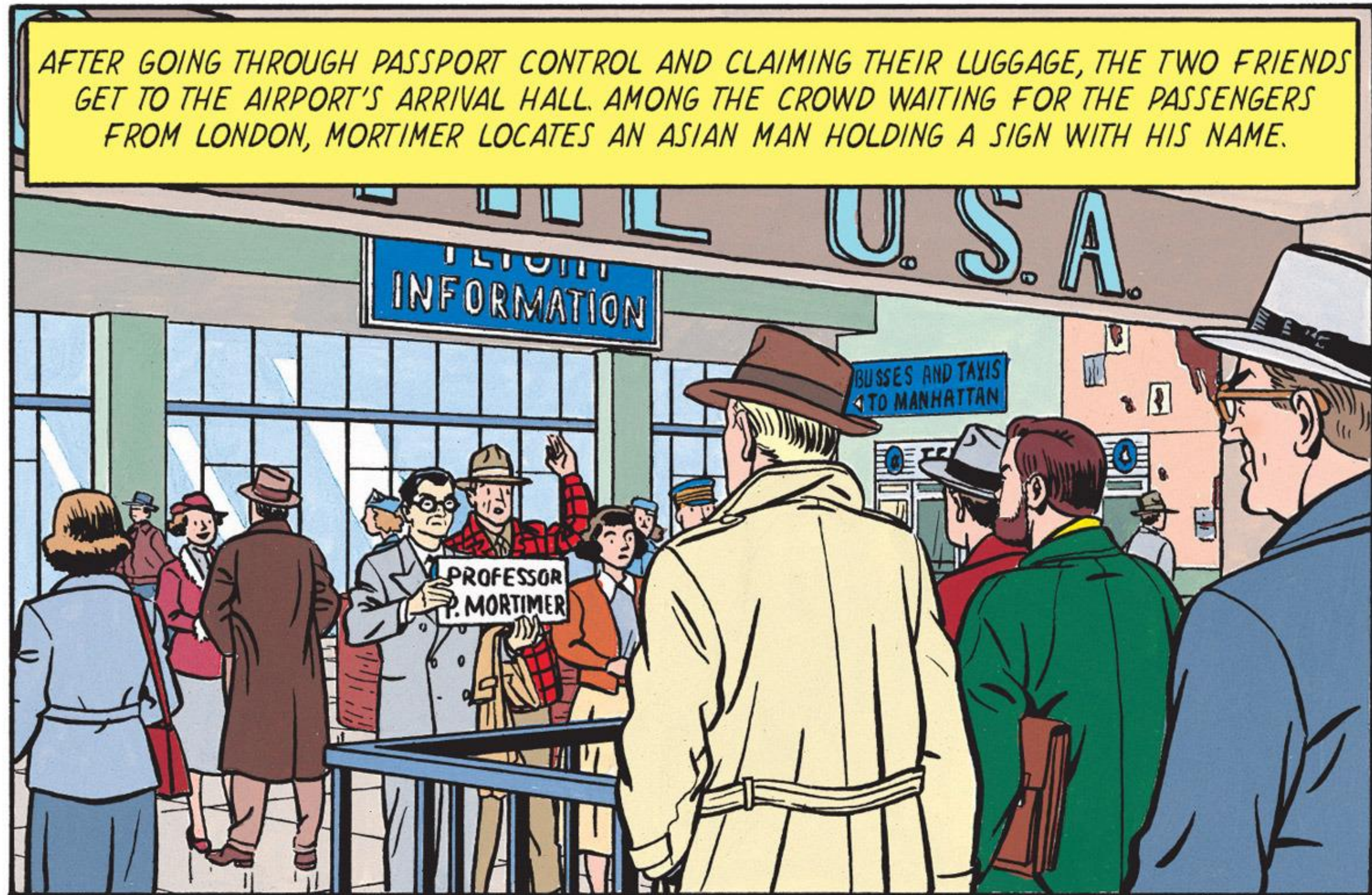
Blake and Mortimer head to the United States to investigate the mysterious circumstances surrounding the discovery of a 177-year-old body, which appears to have died very recently. The body is that of a Scottish major, Mortimer's forebear, who was leading a British military expedition to the US in 1777, where he was swallowed up by a strange multi-coloured light-beam shining down from the sky. Blake and Mortimer fight men in black armed with green-laser guns and soldiers emerging from the past in order to save the Earth from complete obliteration.



Jean **Van Hamme** is one of Belgium's most successful contemporary novelists and comics writers. His most popular successes are "Thorgal" (illustrated by **Rosinski**), "Largo Winch" (illustrated by **Francq**), "Lady S." (illustrated by **Aymond**), translated and published in English by Cinebook, and "XIII" (illustrated by **Vance**). In 2005, he was appointed "Officier des Arts et des Lettres" by the French Minister of Culture.

The artist Ted **Benoit** is a big admirer and supporter of the Clear Line graphic style instituted by **Hergé** and E. P. **Jacobs**. His work is described simply as a combination of extravagance, meticulousness and intelligence. For over 30 years, Ted **Benoit** has been creating work of surprisingly powerful simplicity, from the "Vers la Ligne Claire" collection in 1979 to the "Un Nouveau Monde" collection published in 2006.





Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*, *King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn/Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls/Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine *Tintin* was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with two teams of writers and artists: Van Hamme/Benoit and Sente/Juillard.



Volumes published in the Blake & Mortimer series:

1. 1950 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T1: The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 1*
2. 1953 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T2: The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 2*
3. 1953 - *Le Secret de l'Espadon, T3: The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 3*
4. 1954 - *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1 - Cinebook N°2 - 2007*
5. 1955 - *Le Mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2: The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2 - Cinebook N°3 - 2008*
6. 1956 - *La Marque Jaune: The Yellow "M" - Cinebook N°1 - 2007*
7. 1957 - *L'Énigme de l'Atlantide: Atlantis Mystery*
8. 1959 - *S.O.S. Météores: S.O.S. Meteors - Cinebook N°6 - 2009*
9. 1962 - *Le Piège diabolique: The Time Trap*
10. 1967 - *L'Affaire du Collier: The Affair of the Necklace - Cinebook N°7 - 2010*
11. 1971 - *Les trois Formules du Professeur Satō, T1: Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 1*
12. 1990 - *Les trois Formules du Professeur Satō, T2: Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 2*
13. 1996 - *L'Affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit): The Francis Blake Affair - Cinebook N°4 - 2008*
14. 2000 - *La Machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard): The Voronov Plot - Cinebook N°8 - 2010*
15. 2001 - *L'Étrange Rendez-Vous (Van Hamme/Benoit): The Strange Encounter - Cinebook N°5 - 2009*
16. 2003 - *Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard): The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1*
17. 2004 - *Les Sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard): The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2*
18. 2008 - *Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard): The Gondwana Shrine*
19. 2009 - *La malédiction des 30 deniers (Van Hamme/Sterne/De Spiegeleer): The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver*

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